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CYCLE GUIDE

LIQUID-COOLED WOODS WONDER:
Husqvarna 400WR

TEACUP ROADRACING:
Yamaha TZ250

MIDDLEWEIGHT TITLE FIGHT

WRIST-ROCKET ATTACK:

- Honda VF500F
- Kawasaki GPz550
- Suzuki GS550ES
- Yamaha FJ600
- Yamaha RZ350

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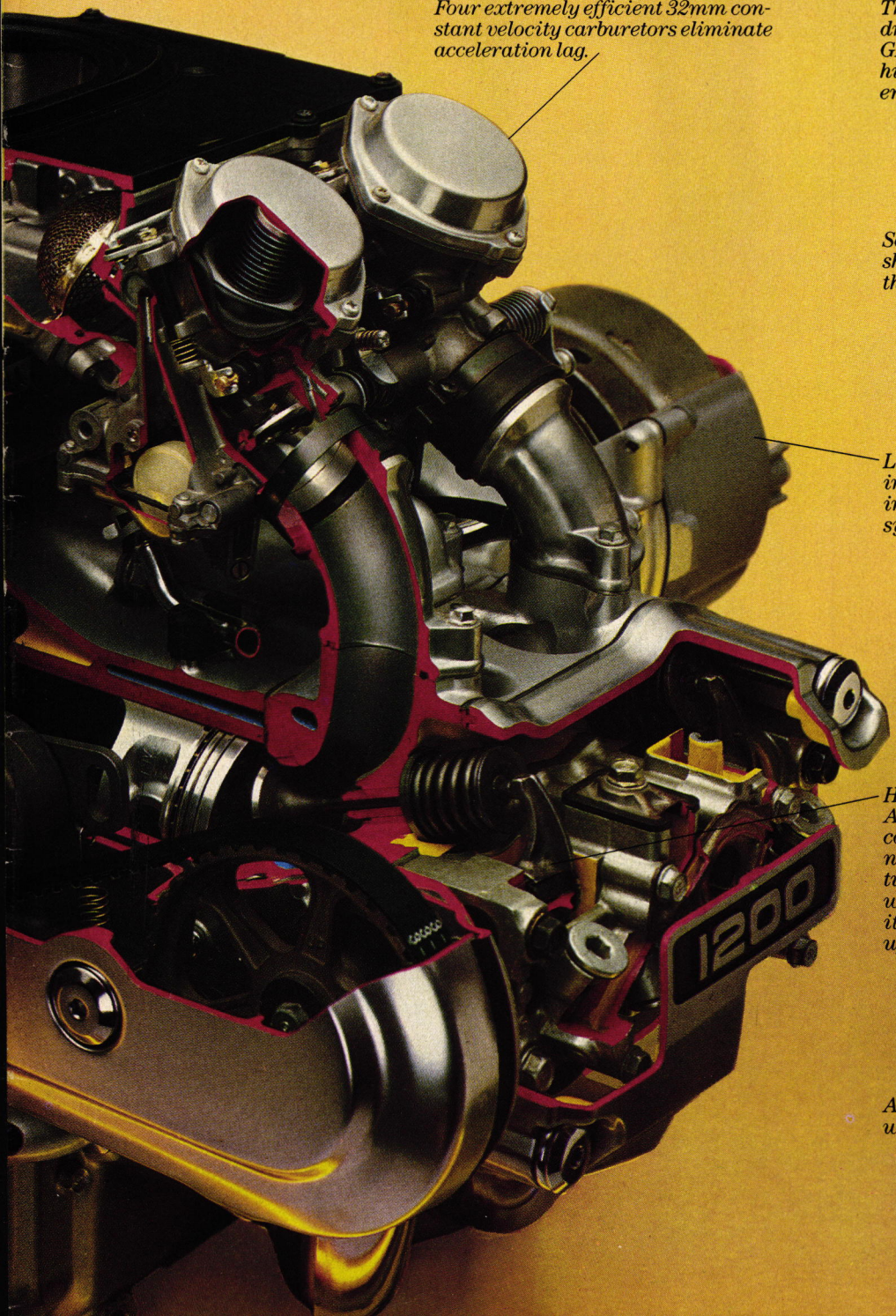

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ON THE COVER:
According to the oddsmakers, the middleweight title bout will go the distance, with knees dragging and sparks flying through every round. You can place your bet on any of these five and have a 20 percent chance of winning, or you could be a 100 percent sure by turning to page 10. David Dewhurst covered the bases by getting all five on film.

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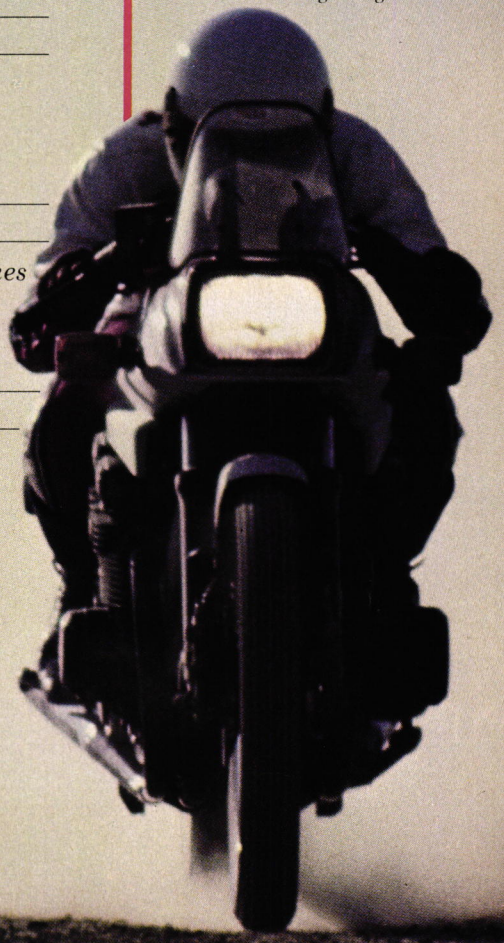

CYCLE GUIDE'S CYCLE GUIDE

Cycle Guide's catalog of recent test hardware—no brag, just fact

OFF-ROAD

MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE	TYPE	ENGINE TYPE	WHEEL TRAVEL, IN. FRONT/REAR	WEIGHT, LBS.	RAKE/TRAIL, DEGREES/INCHES	GEARS
Cagiva WMX250-'84	January '84	Motocross	Two-stroke	11.9/12.7	221	28.0/4.65	6
Can-Am Sonic MX-'83	January '83	Motocross	Four-stroke	11.6/12.1	272	28.0/4.24	5
Honda ATC200X-'83	August '83	ATV	Four-stroke	7.2/6.2	285	N/A	5
Honda ATC250R-'84	May '84	ATV	Two-stroke	8.8/8.0	311	N/A	5
Honda CR125R-'84	April '84	Motocross	Two-stroke	11.2/12.3	195	27.2/4.29	6
Honda CR250R-'84	February '84	Motocross	Two-stroke	11.7/12.2	216	26.7/4.13	5
Honda CR500R-'84	June '84	Motocross	Two-stroke	12.0/12.5	228	27.2/4.25	5
Honda XR350R-'83	June '83	Enduro	Four-stroke	10.9/10.4	253	26.0/3.94	6
Honda XR500R-'83	October '83	Desert	Four-stroke	11.0/12.2	278	25.5/3.94	5
Husqvarna 250CR-'83	January '83	Motocross	Two-stroke	11.8/12.7	227	30.0/5.51	6
Husqvarna 400WR-'84	July '84	Enduro	Two-stroke	11.0/11.2	242	28.5/5.16	6
Husqvarna 500CR-'83	May '83	Motocross	Two-stroke	11.8/12.8	240	30.0/5.51	4
Husqvarna 500XC-'83	October '83	Desert	Two-stroke	11.7/12.8	245	30.0/5.98	6
Kawasaki KXT250 Tecate-'84	May '84	ATV	Two-stroke	8.6/8.2	319	N/A	5
Kawasaki KDX200-'83	July '83	Enduro	Two-stroke	9.8/11.0	213	28.0/4.76	6
Kawasaki KDX250-'83	November '83	Enduro	Two-stroke	10.1/10.7	232	29.0/5.00	6
Kawasaki KX125-'84	April '84	Motocross	Two-stroke	11.7/12.2	195	27.5/4.57	6
Kawasaki KX250-'84	February '84	Motocross	Two-stroke	11.6/12.3	220	28.5/4.65	5
Kawasaki KX500-'83	May '83	Motocross	Two-stroke	11.7/11.9	232	29.0/4.80	5
KTM MC 495-'83	May '83	Motocross	Two-stroke	11.9/12.4	249	28.0/4.21	4
Maico 490 Sand Spider-'83	October '83	Desert	Two-stroke	12.0/12.7	243	27.0/4.72	5
Maico 490 Spider-'83	May '83	Motocross	Two-stroke	11.8/12.2	240	27.0/4.72	4
Suzuki ALT50-'83	June '83	ATV	Two-stroke	N/A	90	N/A	1
Suzuki RM125-'84	April '84	Motocross	Two-stroke	11.5/12.4	190	29.5/4.84	6
Suzuki RM250-'84	February '84	Motocross	Two-stroke	11.8/12.9	220	27.8/4.41	5
Suzuki RM500-'83	May '83	Motocross	Two-stroke	11.9/12.8	234	29.7/4.84	4
Yamaha IT250-'83	November '83	Enduro	Two-stroke	11.0/11.3	233	28.0/4.65	6
Yamaha TT600K-'83	August '83	Trail	Four-stroke	11.7/10.8	280	28.0/4.65	5
Yamaha YZ125-'84	April '84	Motocross	Two-stroke	11.9/12.3	194	27.7/4.57	6
Yamaha YZ250-'84	February '84	Motocross	Two-stroke	11.3/12.6	214	28.0/4.69	5
Yamaha YZ490-'84	June '84	Motocross	Two-stroke	11.3/12.7	227	28.5/4.72	4

STREET

MAKE & MODEL	ISSUE	ENGINE TYPE*	DISPLACEMENT, CC	QUARTER-MILE, SEC./MPH	TOP SPEED, MPH	WEIGHT, LBS.	FUEL CONSUMPTION, MPG	STOPPING DISTANCE FROM 60 MPH, FT.
BMW R100RS-'84	March '84	2C/G	979.9	13.172/100.11	125	495	27–50	148
H-D FXRS Low Glide-'84	January '84	45 deg. 2D/F	1337.7	13.917/94.57	112	575	38–48	140
H-D FXRT Sport Glide-'84	March '84	45 deg. 2D/F	1337.7	13.928/93.65	112	639	34–61	140
H-D FLTC Tour Glide-'84	March '84	45 deg. 2D/F	1337.7	14.603/88.75	107	774	39–54	152
H-D XLS Roadster-'83	April '83	45 deg. 2D/F	997.6	13.842/93.94	106	515	43–55	138
H-D XLX-61-'83	June '83	45 deg. 2D/F	997.6	13.459/95.94	106	488	40–72	128
Honda CX650 Custom-'83	May '83	80 deg. 2E/G	673.5	12.560/102.97	119	454	38–48	124
Honda CX650 Turbo-'83	March '83	80 deg. 2E/G	673.5	12.093/111.66	137†	538	25–44	124
Honda GL1200A Aspencade-'84	March '84	4C/G	1181.9	13.156/98.14	118	744	33–46	141
Honda Nighthawk 550-'83	July '83	4A/G	572.3	12.461/102.97	114	429	37–49	125
Honda Nighthawk 650-'83	December '82	4A/G	656.0	12.287/108.04	122	451	29–51	127
Honda Nighthawk S-'84	February '84	4A/G	696.7	12.048/109.75	125	492	28–45	125
Honda VF400F-'83	September '83	90 deg. 4D/F	399.1	13.588/96.35	112	402	34–51	127
Honda VF500F Interceptor-'84	July '84	90 deg. 4D/F	497.6	12.484/106.00	126	419	33–48	123
Honda VF750F Interceptor-'84	May '84	90 deg. 4D/F	748.1	11.890/114.64	140	511	23–39	127
Honda VF1000F Interceptor-'84	May '84	90 deg. 4D/F	998.4	11.121/123.45	150	536	23–45	125
Honda V45 Sabre-'83	September '83	90 deg. 4D/G	748.1	12.179/111.11	128	514	33–46	130
Honda VT500 Ascot-'83	October '83	52 deg. 2D/G	490.9	13.628/93.75	112	411	41–61	129
Honda VT750C Shadow-'83	April '83	45 deg. 2D/G	749.6	12.906/100.78	127	484	48–55	132
Kawasaki GPz550-'84	July '84	4A/F	553.8	12.559/105.38	123	436	32–59	136
Kawasaki GPz750-'84	May '84	4A/F	739.0	12.114/110.97	135	502	37–47	120
Kawasaki GPz750 Turbo-'83	July '83	4A/F	739.0	11.225/123.53	146	514	N/A	N/A
Kawasaki GPz1100-'84	May '84	4A/F	1089.9	11.312/120.80	145	560	24–48	120
Kawasaki KZ550 Spectre-'83	May '83	4A/G	553.8	13.348/96.77	116†	441	44–56	137
Kawasaki KZ750-L3-'83	January '83	4A/F	739.0	12.095/108.95	134†	487	47–53	132
Kawasaki Ninja-'84	May '84	4A/F	908.2	11.181/123.62	146	523	24–44	126
Kawasaki Voyager-'84	March '84	6A/G	1286.1	13.346/97.61	116	882	28–44	142
Laverda RGS 1000-'84	December '83	3A/F	980.8	12.565/106.50	130	556	25–40	140
Suzuki GS450E-'83	January '83	2A/F	448.2	14.236/93.16	106†	384	39–49	131
Suzuki GS450G Automatic-'83	February '83	2A/G	448.2	16.412/82.34	94†	410	36–59	143
Suzuki GS550ES-'84	July '84	4A/F	572.3	12.675/103.68	123	444	30–51	137
Suzuki GS650M Katana-'83	November '83	4A/G	673.9	13.238/101.01	122†	491	49–60	137
Suzuki GS750E-'83	August '83	4A/F	747.4	11.893/112.92	131†	485	35–50	135
Suzuki XN85 Turbo-'83	March '83	4A/F	673.9	12.381/107.14	132†	521	34–46	120
Yamaha RZ350-'84	December '84	2A/F††	347.4	13.529/97.61	111	357	26 53	122
Yamaha XJ650 Turbo-'83	March '83	4A/G	653.4	13.059/103.32	126†	543	35–53	126
Yamaha FJ600-'84	July '84	4A/F	598.8	12.468/105.63	126	435	32–50	129
Yamaha FJ1100-'84	June '84	4A/F	1097.6	10.992/124.48	146	535	27–46	121
Yamaha 920 Virago-'83	April '83	75 deg. 2D/G	920.0	12.835/101.46	108	503	38–45	138
Yamaha Venture Royale-'84	March '84	70 deg. 4D/G	1197.6	12.759/101.46	124	752	37–53	137

***A**-Transverse Vertical, **B**-Vertical (single-cylinder only), **C**-Horizontally Opposed, **D**-Tandem Vee, **E**-Transverse Vee, **F**-Chain Final Drive, **G**-Shaft Final Drive, **H**-Belt Final Drive
† indicates a calculated top speed; †† indicates a two-stroke engine

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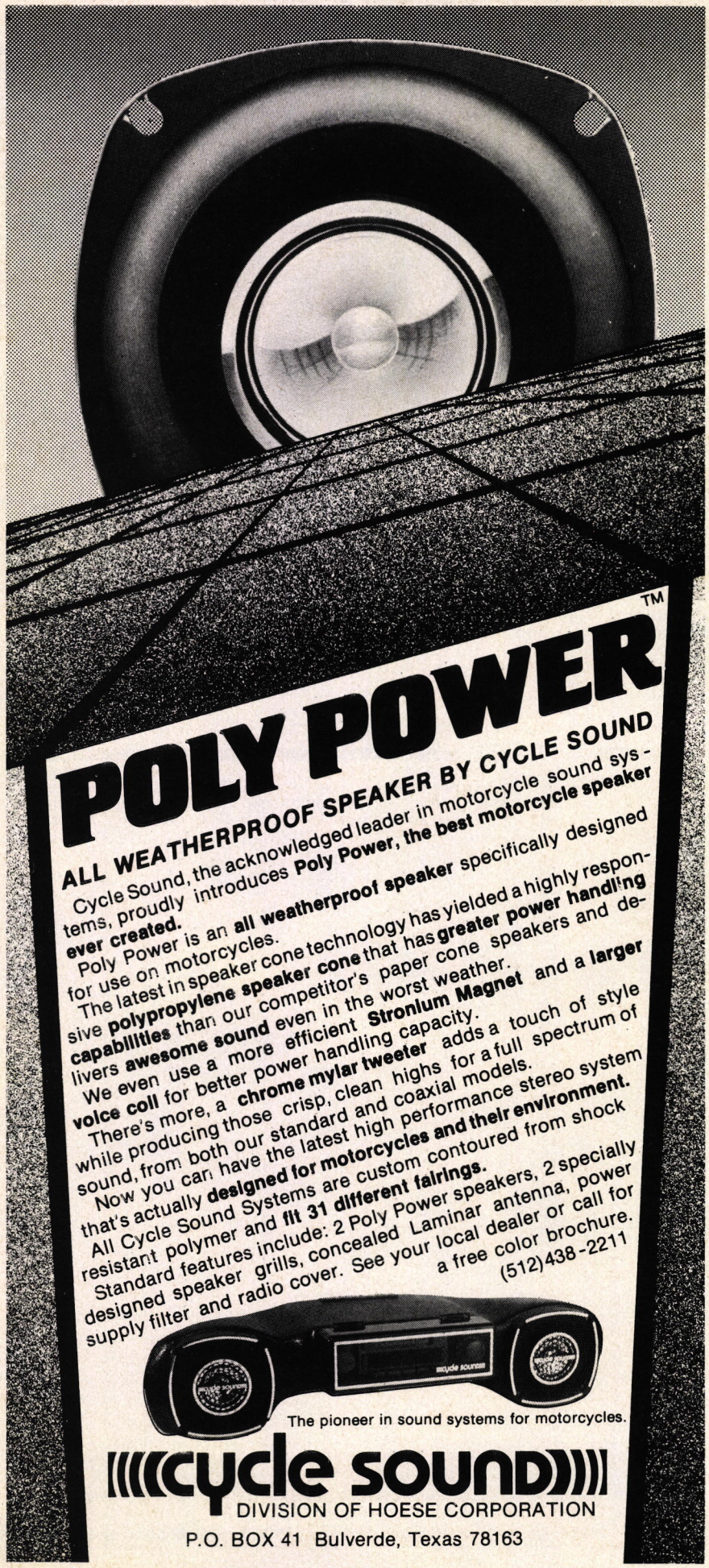
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High Mountains, Tall Tales

I would'a won it if. . . .

• Spring, in my part of upper-Southern California, lasts about fifteen minutes. A wet winter will produce a longer spring, say an hour and a half. This year we had a dry winter.

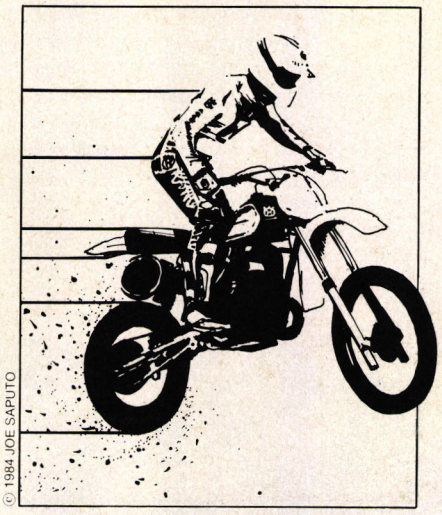
We have only one enduro per year right here in the neighborhood, and the Penguins M.C. always hopes to make it coincide with spring. But the seasonal shift came and went two weeks too soon this year, and by race day the mountains had gone dry, brown and crunchy. That means dust, heat, piles of moaning B- and C-class riders on hillsides, dust, dehydration, pain and dust.

But you go with what you've got. The Hi-Mountain Enduro is the only competitive event most of the local trail riders will enter all year. And, for the hardcore handful, it's the one chance to compete on home turf with the pros from out of town. So we get considerably twitterpated when it comes time for the Hi-Mountain, spring or not.

Of course, this feverish anticipation of showing the fast guys what-for on your favorite trail can backfire, and usually does. This year's Too Much Of A Good Thing award went to Steve Wheeler, who drew the same minute as Malcolm Smith. For two weeks, Wheeler endured the jibes and jests of his regular riding partners, all of whom were covetous. On race day, Wheeler awoke to find his Husky elaborately embroidered in yellow duct tape. The centerpiece, affixed to the tank, was a pennant inscribed, "I love Malcolm." One of the wags, apparently stricken with guilt just before the start, advised him to check the end of the fuel tank vent hose. Yep. Taped shut. "Whatta bunch'a guys," said Wheeler with a forced smile.

Ron Lawson, himself of the Scandinavian persuasion and a staffer on this very magazine, also rode a Husqvarna in the event. "Ya," said Ron, lapsing into the ancestral vernacular, " she goes real good, you betcha." Lawson dropped only five seconds, which sounds great. But since the last check was thrown out, it put him in a four-way tie for 13th place. "I would'a won if about 15 guys had stayed home," said Ron with a forced smile.

Everyone, except of course the winners, seems to have an "I would'a won it if" story. Dennis Pegelow, new to the timekeeping game, spent so much time stopping to look from the rollchart to his wristwatch that by the time he realized he was late, he was too late. And I was following him.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Now, you probably don't believe this, but I actually would have won had it not been for that one rut, the Indians and the bumblebee. Let me explain:

At one of Pegelow's pauses for digital deductions, I wicked the XR250 up to full-chat. Things immediately got interesting, since the Honda has more motor than its suspension will apply to the chore of forward motion. Sure enough, at the first heavily eroded uphill, the bike lunged into a huge rut and stalled. Choking in the dust of passing riders, I had just gotten it restarted when a teenage surf nazi on a motocrosser careened by, clipped the Honda's handlebar and knocked me off. Delirious with heat and rage, I screamed, "I'M GONNA TELL YER MOM!" and grabbed a sizable rock to hurl at him. With the rock went my shoulder, just as it had 30 years ago, when I tried a curve ball for the first pitch of the Little League season. It was wild, too.

Driven by pain and the lack of options, I got underway again just as Pegelow bounced by, looking at his watch. I took out after him, only to find, during a full-lock slide in the next turn, that my rear tire was airless. Up ahead was Black Widow Trail, where I knew the flat tire would help turn me into an object of traction. Days would be spent excavating my body from the decomposed granite.

So I left the course, got lost and pulled up at the gate of the Redwind Indian Reservation. The sign read: "No Alcohol, No Drugs, No Guns." Obviously, I wasn't the first paleface through here. But I was low on fuel, and, what the hell, you could see by my outfit that I wasn't a cowboy. In I went.

The road dropped into a dry creek bed, rose to another closed gate, then to a knoll where four Indians stood watching me. I parked the bike and walked to the gate. One of the younger men came down to parley. "Hello," I said, in my best Gary Cooper imitation. "I've lost the trail. Can you tell me how to get to Turkey Flats?"

"Turkey Flats. . . . Never heard of that. You know you're on private property?"

"Yep," I said, teeth still clenched. "How about the Pozo Saloon?"

"Never heard of that either. I can tell you how to get to Highway 58."

"That'll do fine," I said. He pointed the way, citing landmarks. I thanked him kindly and rode away.

On the way, I somehow got back on the course. The riders coming off Black Widow were flogged, and I began picking off a few on the rocky uphills, which the Honda made easily, even with its flat tire. Soon enough, I was back into race mode and on the gas. I passed Malcolm Smith (or some guy with a big grin on his face) just before the bumblebee landed between my legs.

Instinctively, I stood up and swung mightily at the critter with my left hand. The spike of pain pitched me violently forward, and I simultaneously pegged the throttle and whopped my helmet on the crossbar.

Later, walking bowlegged in the pits, I overheard the talk. "Did you see that Honda on Tower Road? That guy was all tucked in—and he was cookin'!"

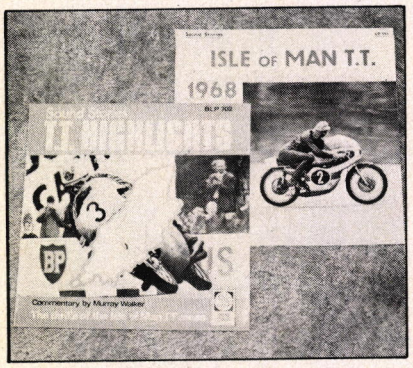
"Yeah, he flew by me just before the cutoff. But he kept going straight, like he didn't even see the turn."

"That was me," I said, with a forced smile. "See, I would'a won if. . . . "

—T.J. Rafferty

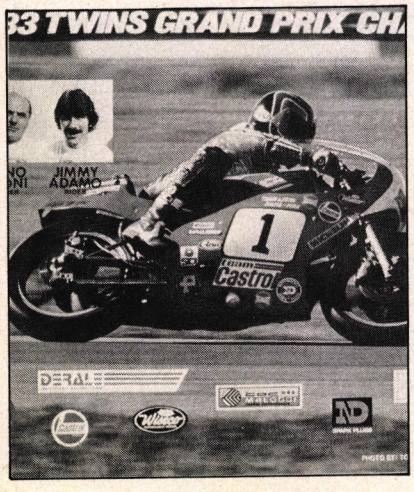
Motomart

Swap talk.

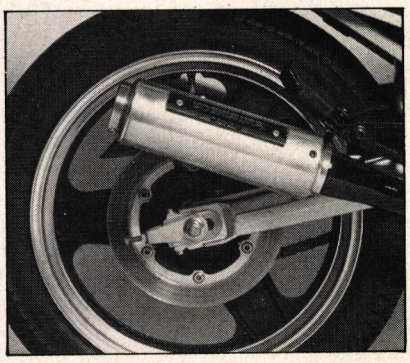


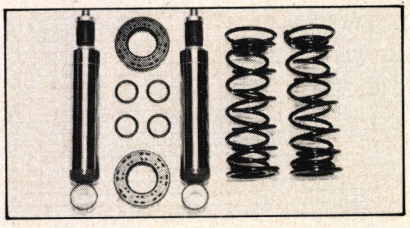
Classical Recordings: Neither Bach nor Beethoven composed them, but Walneck's Sound Stories still should be music to the ears of classic-motorcycle afficionados. The recordings are commentary and sounds of the Isle of Mann TT races, and complement Walneck's two classic-bike publications, "Motorcycle Classic'fieds" and "Japanese Motorcycle Classic'fieds." The recordings are available for $10, plus $2 postage and handling. For further information on the recordings or the publications, write Walneck's Inc., Dept. CG, 8280 Janes Avenue, Suite 222A-1700, Woodridge, Illinois 60517.

Sure-Fire Hit: The combination of Jimmy Adamo on Ducati, Reno Leoni on wrenches and Steve Hallick on Nikon has produced a poster commemorating the Grand Prix Battle Of The Twins championship of the Team Leoni Sure-Fire Ducati. The 16- by 23-inch color poster is available for $3 from Total Image Photography, Dept. CG, 147 Alabama Ave., Hempstead, New York 11550.

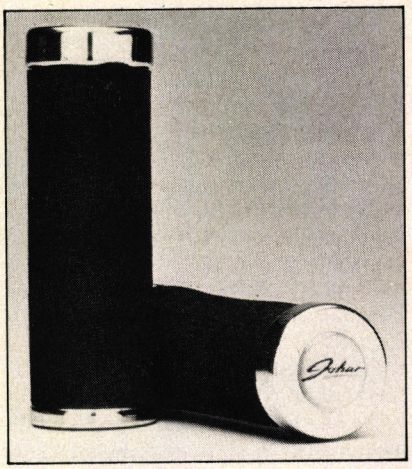


Slip Ons: Anyone can slip on a banana peel, but Interceptor owners can slip on a pair of Yoshimura Pro-Series Slip-On Silencers. These aluminum canister mufflers are replacements for the stock parts, and Yoshimura claims they are lighter and allow the motor to produce more power than do the stock mufflers. The Slip-On Silencers are available for the 500, 750 and 1000 Interceptors, and have a suggested retail price of $149 per pair. For more information on the silencers, write Yoshimura Research and Development of America, Dept. CG, 4555 Carter Court, Chino, California 91710.





Wing Springs: And shocks. Progressive Suspension now offers springs and shocks for the 1984 Honda GL1200. Progressive claims that its stiffer-than-stock rear springs prevent bottoming at low air pressure. This allows owners to use lower air pressures than are possible with the stock springs, which Progressive claims reduces seal wear and extends shock life. The springs can be used with the stock GL shocks, or with Progressive's own replacement units. The rear springs and shocks will fit 80–84 GLs, and have a retail price of $39.95 per set for the springs and $129.95 for the shocks. The company also has fork springs for '75–'84 GLs. Suggested retail price for the springs is $49.95. For more information, contact Progressive Suspension Inc., Dept. CG, P.O. Box 8591, Long Beach, California 90808.

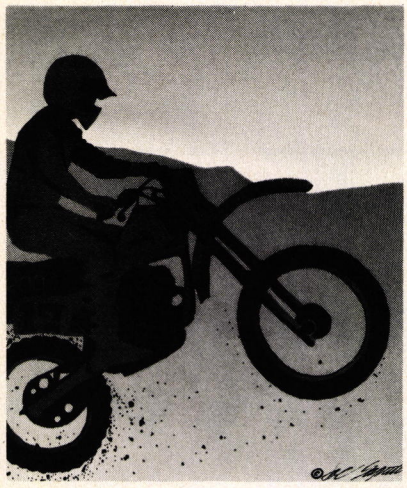


No-Gripe Grips: If you're unhappy with the stock grips on your bike, you might check out a pair of Johar Straight Sleeve Signature grips. They're made of high-tensile-strength 1200 HTG foam, and Johar notes that the caps are triple chrome-plated. The Signature grips are guaranteed for one year against wear and tear, and are available for $14.95 from motorcycle dealers or directly from Johar of California, Dept. CG, 15934 S. Figueroa, Gardena, California 90248.

Hold It: Tools that is, with a roll-up tool pouch from Rev-Pack. The pouch is made of heavy-duty, vinyl-bonded Cordura nylon, and has various-size pockets for tools. Two nylon straps with plastic buckles keep the rolled pouch closed, and a fold-over flap keeps the tools in place. The suggested retail price for the tool pouch is $14.95, plus $2 shipping, and it's available from Rev-Pack, Dept. CG, P.O. Box 175, New Cayuma, California 93254.

WISHBOOK

Minutes from the Last Meeting of the Council of Motorcycle Futurethink



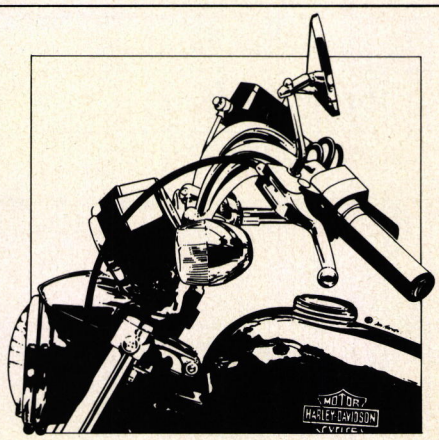
If enduro motorcycles received half of the attention that goes into motocross and streetbikes every year, we wouldn't see such genuinely empty-headed sales features as the timekeeping system on my KDX250. This is supposed to be an enduro bike, so why doesn't it have real enduro equipment?

How about selling us a real enduro-ready machine, Japan? One with a separate clock and odometer, and maybe even a route-chart holder. Or is it too much to ask for an enduro bike that can be run in enduros?

Ronald Noswall
Grainola, Oklahoma

Japan has been trying to sell us "custom" motorcycles for several years now, each with its own style and flair, but with only one or two color choices per bike. And, after all, one black Shadow looks just like every other black Shadow (Vincents aside). If they really wanted to sell a one-of-a-kind, individual bike, they could take a tip from the company that knows best: Harley-Davidson.

Harley's custom paint program borders on genius. It allows each Harley owner to custom-design his own paint



scheme and color combinations. And that's a far cry from Japan's two color choices.

Monte Gilson
Jacksonville, Florida

All Wishbook submissions must include the writer's name and address. Letters will be edited for length.

Performance with Style
YAMAHA
FJ1100
VANCE & HINES
YAMAHA
YAMAHA
YAMAHA
Championship performance. Championship style. Perfect fit. Vance & Hines performance exhaust systems and apparel are available from leading motorcycle and performance shops. Also available from Vance & Hines direct, Visa/MC accepted. $225.00 chrome, $219.00 Kal-Gard black. Vance & Hines, 14010 Marquardt, Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670/(213) 921-7461
VANCE & HINES

COMPARISON ROAD TEST:

Put five 550-class sportbikes into the ring and what do you get? The Middleweight Championship of the World.

BY LARRY WORKS

Overdeveloped, heavyweight sportbikes are big on flexing their muscles, but they don't rule the backroads. A 100-horsepower knockout punch simply isn't required on a tight, twisty two-lane. Finesse, not brute force, is the key to the canyons. In fact, a 550-class sportbike with the right combination of speed and agility can flat humiliate heavyweight sportbikes in the tight stuff.

And the opportunities to bring hyperbikes to their knees, to show them the fast way through the corners, has never been better. The middleweight sport class came out fighting this year like never before. There's Kawasaki's GPz550, of course, the bike that, more than any other, put the 550cc sport class on the map. Suzuki's GS550ES is back, too, little changed from last year's model because Suzuki figured it got the bike right the first time. Then there's the liq-

uid-cooled, vee-four 500 Interceptor from Honda, a half-liter version of the VF750F, the machine that revolutionized sportbiking when it was introduced last year. Finally, there's a middleweight one-two from Yamaha consisting of the FJ600, a single-shock Seca 550 on steroids, and the RZ350, the return to two-stroke streetbikes for the U.S.—albiet a return marked by catalytic convertors.

Such an astounding array of hardware—and such newfound variety in a class long dominated by air-cooled transverse-fours—raises one obvious question: How does this quintet of high-performance middleweights compare? Which one will still be standing at the end of a bare-knuckles title fight? We didn't know, but we knew the one way to settle the argument, no ifs, ands or buts: Put 'em head-to-head on the curviest bits of swervery we know; then run them, flat-out, belly to the ground, on a road course; and finally, aim these wrist-rockets down the dragstrip and launch them through the lights. Which one wins? Well, you'll find out shortly. First, though, you'll have the chance to step into each contender's corner, to watch them weigh in and to get to know them inside out. But when the bell sounds, step back; the slug-fest is on—and the prize is the Middleweight Championship of the World.

Continued

Middleweight Title Fight

Honda VF500F Interceptor

Nothing succeeds like success.

• No doubt about it: Honda's VF750F Interceptor was *the* success story of motorcycling in 1983, and with good reason. The VF750F set new standards for power, tractability, handling and quickness of response that left most of the other manufacturers playing catch-up. And when Honda decided to re-enter the middleweight sportbike class in the U.S., a class the firm had all but abandoned since 1977, the VF750F became the role model, with the VF500F Interceptor as the result.

As you might expect, the 500 resembles a downsized 750, but with a few differences. For instance, the smaller Interceptor has the same type of Pro-Link rear suspension that pivots in needle bearings, and a single, air-adjustable shock with four rebound damping settings. Likewise, both the 750's and the 500's forks feature air-adjustability, and have Honda's mechanically actuated TRAC anti-dive system in the left fork leg. The 500's fork, though, lacks the 750's provision for rebound damping adjustment, and its TRAC uses one fewer link than the 750's but can be adjusted without tools.

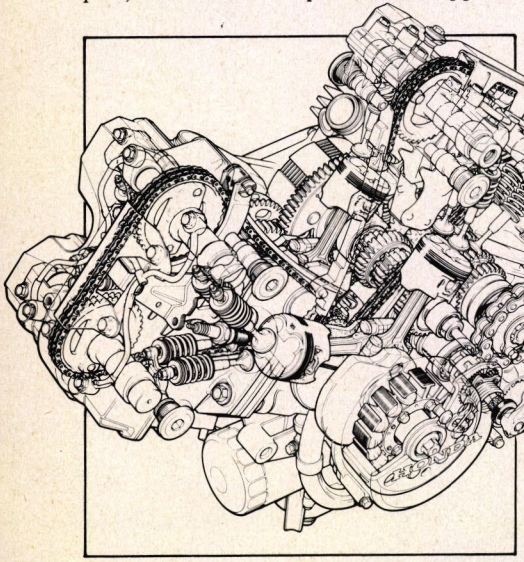
Close inspection of the chassis reveals other minor changes from the VF750F role model but no real departure from the Interceptor formula. Both bikes, for example, have 16-inch front wheels, and their brakes employ the same style of dual-piston calipers; but the 500's calipers have an appearance similar to those on Honda's roadracers. And, finally, the middleweight Interceptor's frame uses both box-section and round tubing, whereas the 750's is an all-box-section-tubing construction.

As for the powerplant, far fewer external clues help differentiate the 500 from its bigger brother. Both engines are liquid-cooled, 90-degree vee-fours with double overhead cams and four valves per cylinder. The 500's motor, however, actually owes more to a pair of engines in motorcycles Honda doesn't even sell in the U.S. — the VT250, a liquid-cooled vee-twin, and the VF400F, a liquid-cooled vee-four.

In fact, the VF500F's top end resembles nothing so much as a pair of VT250s: Bore, stroke, valve sizes and lift, and cam timing are all to VT250 specification. And the result is a neat doubling of horsepower. Honda claims 34 horsepower for the 250 and 68 for the 500.

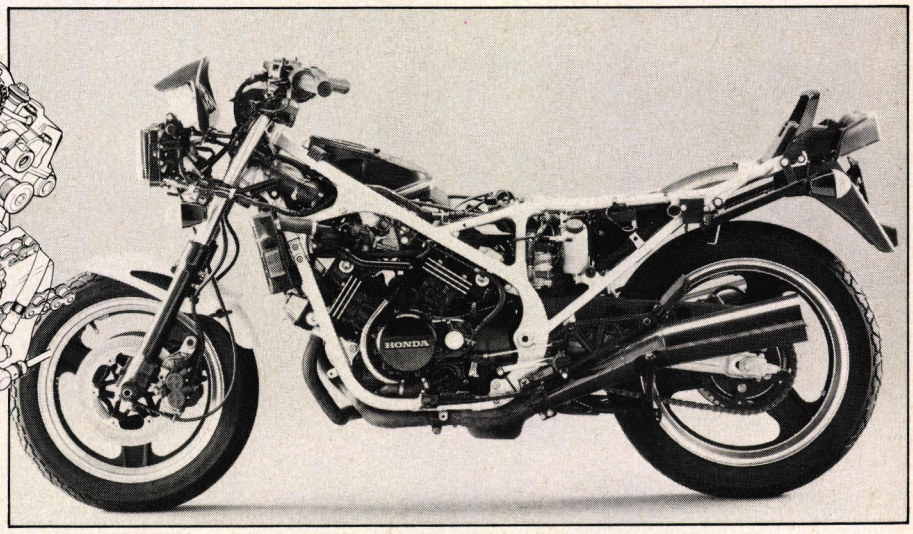
The rest of the 500's powerplant, though, lies far closer to VF400F specs. Both engines share the same bore centers, the same bottom case-half casting, and the same size and thickness of clutch plates, although the 500's clutch uses two additional plates. And all three motors, 250, 400 and 500, have the same type of planetary gearshift mechanism. But most of the other engine components, while laid out identically to the 400's, are beefed up for duty in the 500: Crankpins, main journals, transmission shafts and shift forks all have been strengthened compared to their VF400F counterparts.

If you've been keeping score, then, you might think the VF500F actually is a conglomeration of ideas taken from three different motorcycles: 250, 400 and 750. To a certain extent you'd be right. But Honda didn't change the basic formula of building a fast, responsive motorcycle with a broad powerband; those are Interceptor traits, and the VF500F has them. After all, you don't mess with success. —*Charles Everitt*



VF's top end resembles a pair of VT250s

And pumps out a claimed 68 horsepower.



Maneuverability and a broad powerband are constants in the Interceptor formula

Qualities present in the VF500F, too.

Kawasaki GPz550

Better than ever—but is it good enough?

• If you wanted a cutting-edge 550-class sportbike anytime over the past few years, your choice was simple: You bought a GPz550. Kawasaki so dominated the class that all challenges were little more than minor skirmishes on a very secure border. The balance of power was disrupted last year with the introduction of Suzuki's 16-valve GS550s, but the word from the racetrack remained clear: The GPz still was the reigning 550 champ.

With the 1984 model-year, however, the 550-class dominion Kawasaki has enjoyed is under heavy attack. Those borderline skirmishes have turned into an all-out assault on the 550 class, and Kawasaki is smack in the middle of firefight, with contenders coming at the GPz from all directions. But Kawasaki wasn't about to be caught flat-footed, and 1984 also marks the most significant changes made to the GPz500 since it first evolved from the KZ550 in 1981. Most apparent is the change in the bike's appearance; Kawasaki redressed the 550 with a fairing, bodywork and instrumentation to make it a downsized clone of the 750 and 1100 GPzs.

More important to hot-blooded 550-class riders, though, is that Kawasaki managed to generate even more horsepower from the eight-valve, air-cooled, transverse-four GPz motor—a claimed five horsepower more, in fact. This year, cam timing has been advanced and duration increased, and the centrifugal-type ignition advance used on previous Kawasaki 550s was replaced with an all-electronic advance that provides more spark advance at all engine speeds. Also, carburetor venturi size was upped 1mm; the 26mm Teikei Kikaki constant-vacuum carbs on last year's 550 were replaced with similar units with 27mm venturi measurements. The total of the changes isn't only increased horsepower; Kawasaki claims the power peak was raised to the engine's 10,500-rpm redline.

Every bit as significant as the power increase are the changes Kawasaki made to the GPz's chassis. This year, the 550's Uni-Trak rear suspension has been revised, and the triangulated, round-tube swingarm found on previous GPz550s was scrapped in favor of an extruded aluminum unit. The shock linkage was altered as well, and now is located beneath the swingarm, mounting to the shock's bottom eye as on the larger GPzs. Also new for this year—and also as per 750- and 1100-spec—was the addition of an anti-dive system. Brake-line hydraulic pressure actuates the system, with one unit on the bottom of each fork slider.

Although the 550's list of handling modifications didn't include a 16-inch front wheel for 1984, Kawasaki took other steps to quicken the GPz's steering response. First, the 19-inch front wheel standard on previous GPz550s was replaced with an 18-inch rim. And to further quicken the steering, Kawasaki steepened the steering head angle 1.5 degrees (now 26 degrees) and cut the trail 15mm (now 95mm).

All told, this year's GPz550 is the fastest, best-handling middleweight sportbike Kawasaki ever has built. The only question remaining is how it fares in the half-liter wars against the toughest competiton it's ever faced.

—Larry Works

Kawasaki's GPz550 was the yardstick of the middleweight sport class for years

And now, with revamped engine and chassis, the GPz might measure up again.

Continued

Suzuki GS550ES

Suzuki leaves well enough alone.

• Last year's GS550ES was a reborn bike with a mission: Knock off Kawasaki's GPz550 and bring the midsize-sportbike crown to Suzuki. And, depending upon who you talk to and how the bikes were judged, the '83-version GS550 did just that. For '84, though, the stakes have changed. Last year, Suzuki had only the GPz to beat; this year both Honda and Yamaha have joined the fray with potent midsizers of their own. The straightforward shootout of '83 has turned into an all-out war.

Suzuki's 1984 GS550ES comes to do battle virtually unchanged from its '83 configuration. The bike was reworked top to bottom for last year, and Suzuki is betting that redesign still has what it takes to win. Indeed, this 550 is, without question, a state-of-the-art execution of the air-cooled inline-four-powered sportbike concept. In fact, when rebuilding the GS550, Suzuki used the same technology employed on its larger-displacement sportbikes; as a result, the new machine had almost nothing in common with any Suzuki 550 before it.

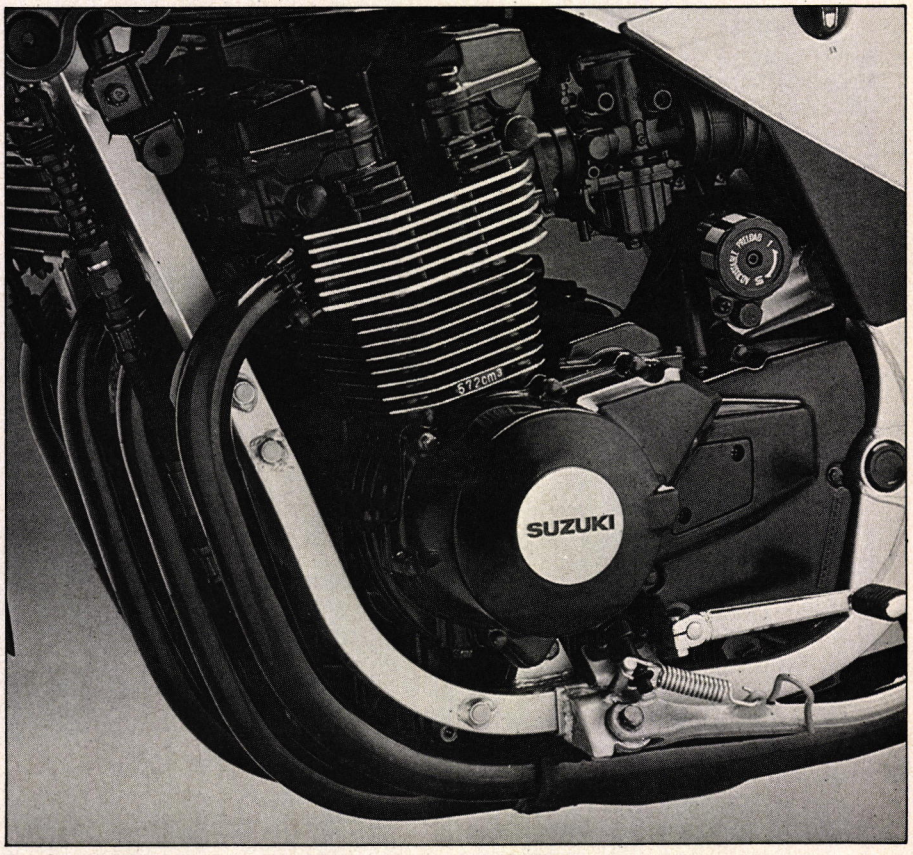
The 550 designation is somewhat misleading, though, because the ES's engine, a 16-valve twin-cam four with Suzuki's TSCC (Twin Swirl Combustion Chamber) feature, actually displaces 572cc. And at 60.0mm by 50.6mm, its bore and stroke dimensions are decidely oversquare. Because of the narrow, 40-degree valve angle and shallow combustion chambers, this powerplant uses flat-top pistons to get its 9.8:1 compression ratio. Also different from previous GS550s are longer-duration, longer-overlap cams, with forked followers replacing the old engine's shim-and-bucket setup for simplified valve adjustment.

That '83 redesign extended down into the engine cases, too, where a forged one-piece crankshaft took the place of the built-up unit, and an inverted-tooth cam chain replaced the old engine's roller chain. Other internal revamps included the addition of a spring washer for the clutch, and a completely new set of gears and shafts for the six-speed gearbox, although the internal ratios weren't changed. The new engine also got a pair of 30mm two-barrel Mikuni constant-vacuum carburetors, replacing the four separate carburetors that had been used on previous Suzuki 550s. Both carburetor venturis share a common diaphragm, enrichening circuit and float chamber that serve separate butterfly valves, slides and jets for each port.

And the bike's chassis was significantly changed, too. The GS550 got an all-new frame that made good use of existing technology. With 1 inch less wheelbase, 1 degree less steering-head angle and 14mm less trail than the pre-'83 550—and a 16-inch front wheel, as well—the GS has the geometry needed to put it in with the quickest of the corner-carvers. Rear suspension wasn't overlooked, either. A linkage-type, rising-rate single shock replaced the twin shocks of previous GS550s.

The ES, then, is a one-year-old engine and chassis in the middle of a 1984 battlefield. New graphics for the bodywork, gold-anodized wheels and a simpler fuel petcock to replace the often pesky trapdoor arrangement on last year's model are the only differences between the '83 and the '84 versions. What's changed, of course, is the nature of the battle itself. But Suzuki is hoping that what worked once will work again.

—Joe Kress



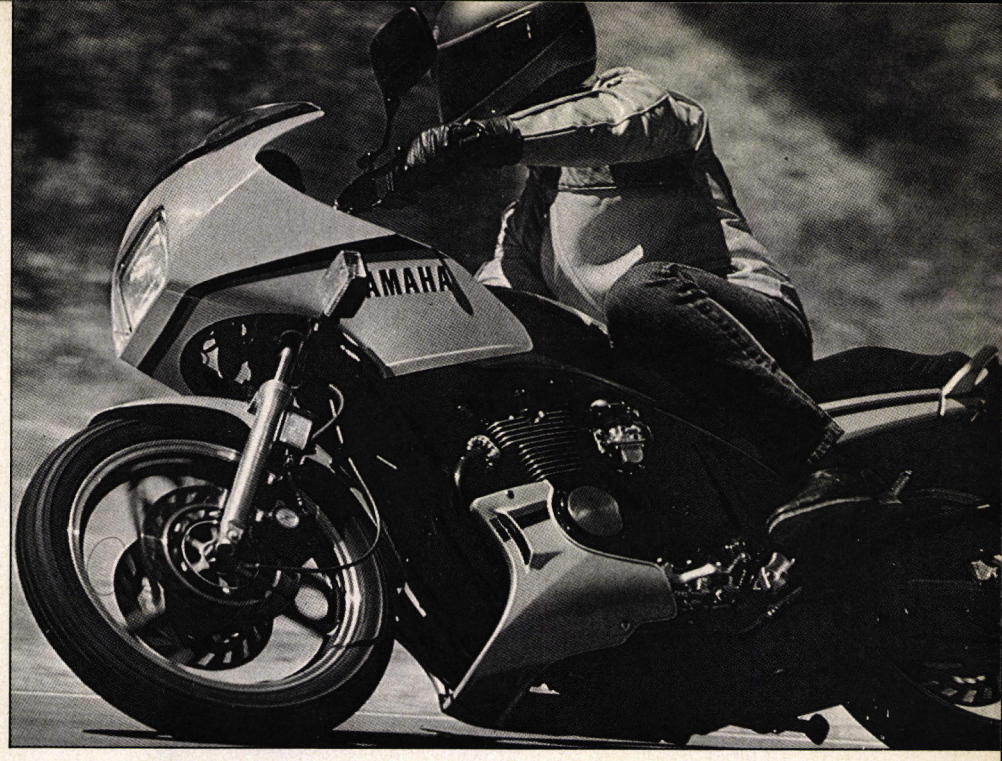
© 1984 VIC HUBER

The Suzuki GS is billed as an '84 550, but it's really a '83 572

It's still a high-water mark for air-cooled, transverse-four technology.

Yamaha FJ600

The latest generation in three family lines.



• Yamaha's FJ600 has to do more than just pull a middleweight shift in Yamaha's streetbike rank and file. The 600 is a new-for-1984 model that's intended to do the work of three previous models.

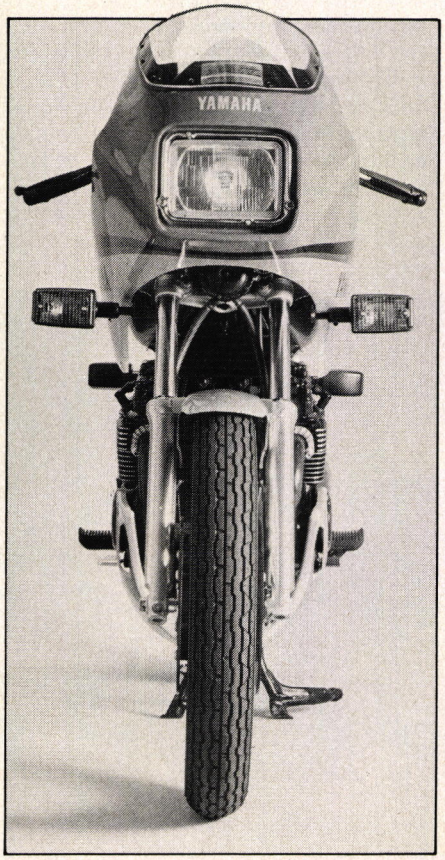
That workload won't be as hard as it sounds. Yamaha's middleweight lineup has been fragmented for several years, with the vee-twin Vision and the inline-four Seca 550 and 650 all targeted at overlapping segments of the market. Yamaha just simplified its line by taking the most successful of the three—the eight-valve, DOHC Seca 550—and grooming it to do battle with the high-tech '84 machinery from other manufacturers. The Vision and the Secas still are available, but as 1983 and 1982 models.

Part of that grooming process included boosting the 550's displacement to 598cc. In doing so, Yamaha took full advantage of the rules of many racing organizations that permit bikes up to 600cc to race in the same class as 550s. The displacement increase was attained through a 1.5mm bore increase and a 3.9mm-longer stroke; and in virtually every other specification, the 600's engine is tuned more for performance than was the 550's. Both the 600's intake and exhaust valves are larger than the 550's, and the combustion chambers were reshaped, giving the FJ a 10:1 compression ratio (the 550's was 9.5:1). Each of the 600's four Mikuni constant-vacuum carburetors is 4mm larger than the 550's, at 32mm, and the 600's cams have more lift, more duration and more overlap. Yamaha's Induction Control System, a series of small, interconnected intake sub-ports designed to improve low-speed combustion through increased swirl of the fuel charge, was deleted from the 600's specs list. Yamaha claims this system, which reportedly increases fuel mileage, also limits a bike's performance potential, and performance was a high priority for the 600.

High performance also is obvious in the 600's chassis—although it's clear that Yamaha didn't ignore cost considerations. Instead of creating a completely new frame for the 600, Yamaha revised the 550's. Ahead of the swingarm pivot, frame construction on the 550 and 600 is almost identical, although the 600 does have a 1-degree-steeper rake and 3mm less trail (26 degrees and 106mm). A far more obvious change is the switch from twin shocks to the Monocross single-shock suspension system. The Yamaha-made deCarbon shock has no external damping adjusters, although preload can be altered to any of four different settings via a pulley connected to the shock by a Gilmer belt.

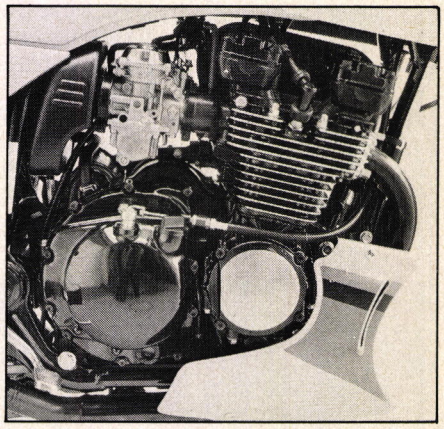
Neither preload nor damping adjustments can be easily made to the Kayaba fork, and it lacks even the now-common aircaps. Yamaha spokesmen claim that increasing the air pressure in a fork is a poor method of adjustment. Instead, changes in oil viscosity and level are recommended for riders who need to tune the front suspension.

Still, the FJ has a host of features not found on the 550, including a rubber-mounted engine, a twin-disc front brake, an aluminum fork brace and an oil cooler. Under all those changes, though, there's still a lot of Seca left in the FJ. But that's all right; a little experience always helps when you're new on the job. —*Ron Lawson*



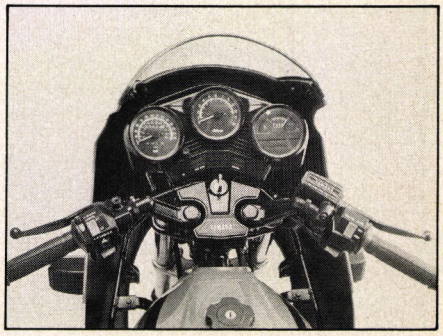
The FJ600 is the largest of the five

But not the heaviest or widest.



The FJ replaces several middleweights

But the motor still has a lot of Seca.



Nonadjustable FJ handlebar

Teamed with uncomfortable FJ grips.

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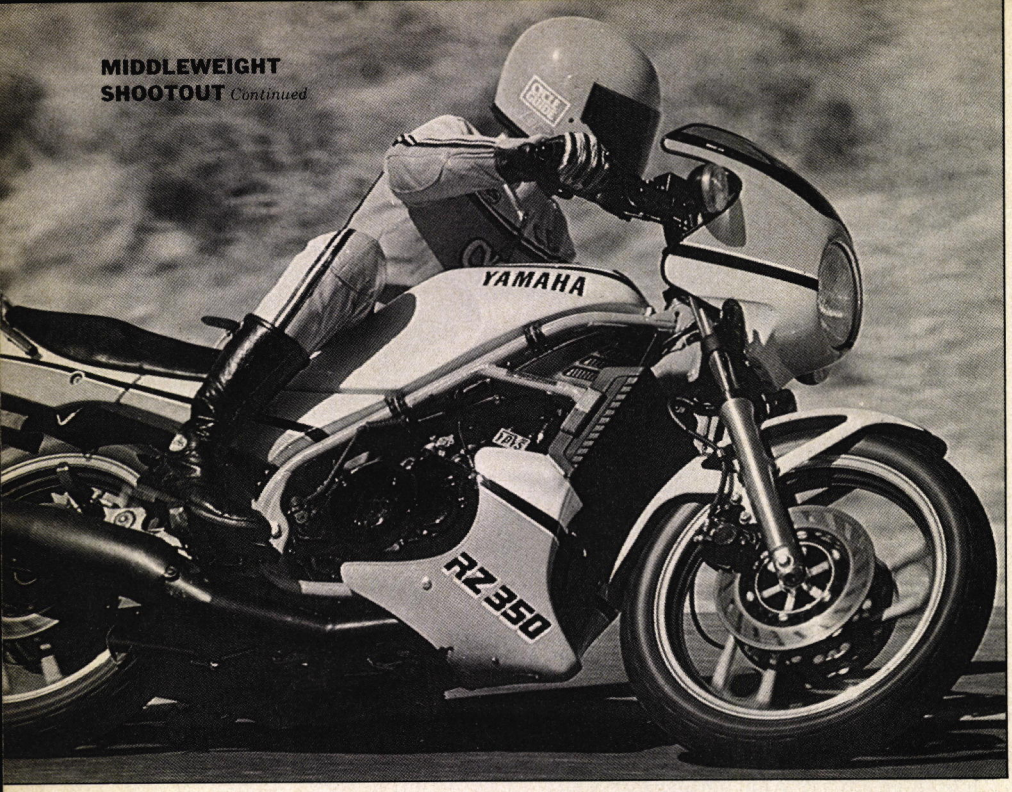


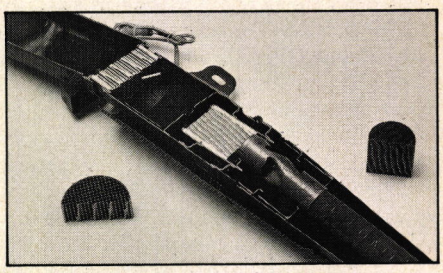
Yamaha RZ350

The original pocket-rocket returns.

• If there's a dark horse in this group of middleweight flyers, it's the RZ350. As much as 250cc smaller than the others, the RZ seems an apparent underdog on paper. That appraisal, however, ignores a few facts in the RZ's favor, not the least of which is that the RZ and its predecessors have racked up more miles on racetracks than the rest of the group has on the street.

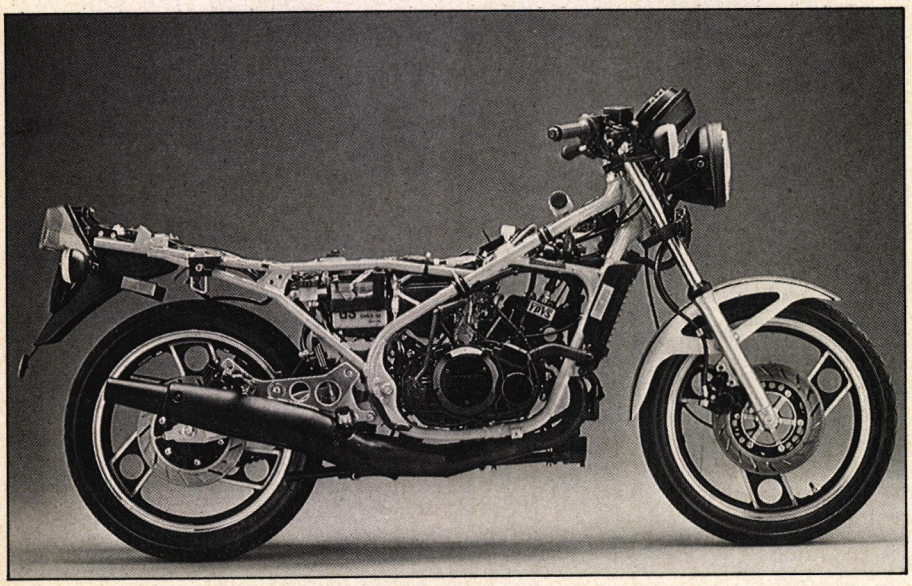
Despite its heritage, the RZ comes to this country not from the racetrack, but from the streets of Japan, Canada and Europe. The basic specifications for the American RZ are the same as for the Canadian model we tested in December 1983. The engine is a liquid-cooled, two-stroke twin, with a six-speed transmission and a reed-valve-controlled intake. Lubrication is by oil injection, and the engine is rubber-mounted. Bore and stroke are 64.0mm by 54.0mm, for an actual displacement of 347cc. The RZ is also equipped with Yamaha's Power Valve System, which broadens the powerband by varying the exhaust-port height according to engine rpm. Unlike the purely mechanical systems on Yamaha's motocrossers, the YPVS on the RZ is electromechanical. An ignition sensor monitors engine rpm and a microprocessor positions the valve via an electric servo and dual cables. Although the YPVS hardware is similar for all RZs, the power-valve timing differs on the American RZ350. On U.S.-spec RZs, the power valve begins opening at 5500 rpm, and is fully open at 9500 rpm. On other models the valve operates between 3500-6500 rpm.

Power-valve timing on the U.S. models was recalibrated for the different power characteristics, which resulted from the addition of a pair of catalytic convertors in each muffler to reduce exhaust emissions. The convertors required other tuning changes as well. Normal operating temperature for the catalytic convertors is 1600 degrees Fahrenheit, but they can overheat if the carburetors are not synchronized. Consequently, the 26mm Mikunis are operated by a mechanical linkage and push-pull cables rather than by individual cables. To reduce hydrocarbon emissions even further, each muffler has a reed-valve-controlled air intake, much like the system used on Kawasaki four-strokes. The net result of the system is lower emissions—and less horsepower. American RZs are rated at 52 horsepower, five less than other RZs.



Two-stage convertors clean up exhaust

Squeaky clean for the EPA sniffers.



Yamaha's RZ350 marks the return of the lightweight middleweight

Even when dressed, the RZ is almost 90 pounds lighter than some classmates.

Emissions-related changes aside, the only difference between the U.S. model and its foreign cousins is paint. Its TZ-inspired low-boy frame is tubular mild steel, with a steering head angle of 26 degrees. The air-assisted fork features position-sensitive rebound damping that automatically increases as the fork is compressed. The rising-rate Monocross rear suspension uses a Yamaha-built deCarbon shock, and is adjustable for spring preload only. Eighteen-inch wheels are used front and rear, with a pair of single-action discs handling braking at the front, and a double-action disc working at the rear. Overall, the chassis is unchanged from RZs sold elsewhere, even down to the spring and damping rates.

For American riders, however, the biggest change is the mere existence of a two-stroke for the U.S. market. The RZ350 is the latest and best member of Yamaha's RD/RZ family, which is great news for two-stroke fans, and even better news for two-stroke *racers*. —*Jim Miller*

Continued

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Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

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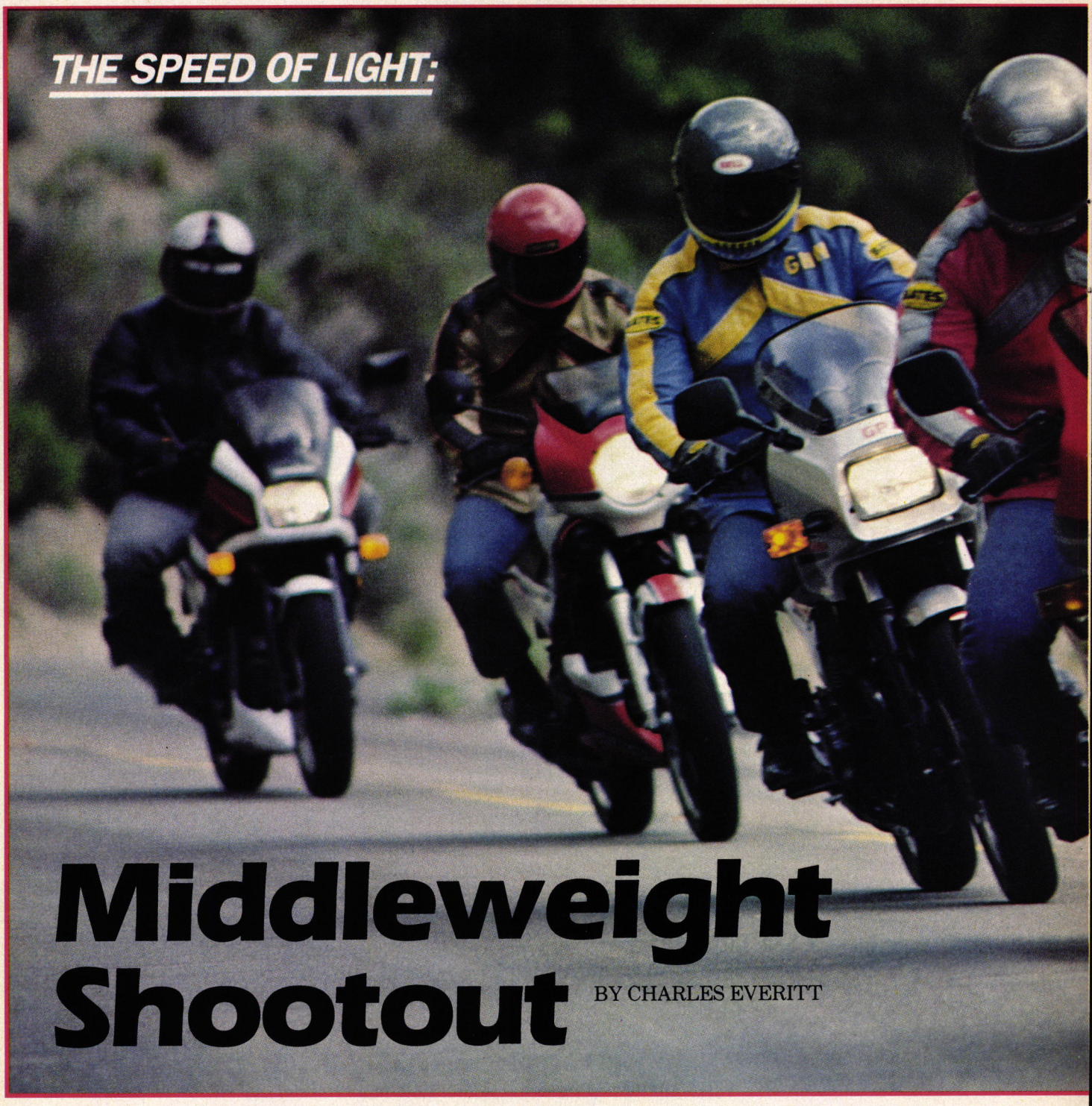


THE SPEED OF LIGHT:

Middleweight Shootout

BY CHARLES EVERITT

Five different ways to carve-up canyon roads. But which one has the sharpest edge?

There's only one way to conduct a middleweight title fight—and it has nothing to do with poring over specs sheets, comparing manufacturer's claims or arguing the merits of one engine configuration over another. No, to separate one winner from the also-rans, in a class where finesse counts more than muscle, you've got to flog them 'til their turnsignals droop and their pegs are scraped to nubbins. You ride them day-in, day-out, on the street, down winding canyon roads and on the racetrack. Only then can you pick the winner, the Middleweight Champion of the World. We know. We left no undercarriage unscraped, no engine redline unviolated.

But there was one bike, Yamaha's RZ350, that made us wonder if it really belonged in this elite group. After all, the RZ would have to face off against bikes almost twice its size; frankly, we were concerned the little two-stroke might not have what it takes to compete in this performance-intensive class. The RZ's runs through Carlsbad Raceway's Chrondeks did little to allay our concerns, because with an E.T. and terminal speed through the quarter-mile of 13.529/97.61, the RZ was by far the slowest of the bunch.

While Yamaha's two-stroke seemed destined to play the underdog role in this shootout, the firm's other contender for the middleweight crown, the FJ600,

looked like the consummate overachiever. At 599cc, the FJ has the largest-displacement engine of the five, and it was almost expected to run away with top honors at the dragstrip. The FJ *did* prove to be the quickest, but only by the slimmest of margins. The four-stroke Yamaha blazed through the lights with a 12.468/105.63 run, but Honda's VF500F, with the smallest-displacement four-stroke engine in the group, cranked off a 12.484/106.00 run. And in between the Yamahas fell Kawasaki's GPz550, with a 12.559/105.38 pass, and Suzuki's GS550ES's time of 12.675/103.68.

Make no mistake; those are impressive times, for the four-strokes, at least. These motorcycles are sporting *middleweights,* though, members of a class whose trademark long has been handling prowess, not the ability to make quick runs down a dragstrip. In fact, the sporting middleweight's mission is to deal with the cut-and-thrust of canyon cornering, and to rush down backroads as quickly as anything—of any displacement.

In that context, Yamaha's FJ600 comes up short. To start with, the FJ has the slowest, heaviest steering of the lot. Yamaha attempted to make the bike responsive by equipping it with a steep, 26-degree steering head angle, but it wasn't enough to overcome the effects of the 18-inch front wheel, 4.17 inches of trail and the bike's size (it's the largest, physically—but not the heaviest—of the five). As a result, "flick" is not a word you'll find in the FJ's handling vocabulary. Its ponderous steering makes hard work out of quick direction changes, and requires you to set-up far earlier for turns than with the other middleweights.

Furthermore, the FJ's sluggish handling doesn't translate into superior stability at speed; the front end starts to oscillate at about 105 mph, and the rear end joins in with a wallow in fast, bumpy corners. Admittedly, the bike stays close to the chosen line, but the chassis' antics quickly erode rider confidence. To the FJ's credit, the bike has excellent brakes, good cornering clearance, plenty of top-end power (although in a relatively narrow, 3500-rpm range), and feels secure in mid-turn on smooth pavement, but those qualities don't make up for its shortcomings in fast riding.

It came as a surprise, then, that the RZ350 clearly outshone its bigger brother. Indeed, the RZ can be one of the most fun, rewarding middleweights to ride fast—provided you make all the right moves. Unlike the FJ, the RZ steers with startling quickness, sometimes overreacting until the rider learns to make more subtle inputs through the handlebar. And the two-stroke twin squirts away from corners with a ferocity that belies its size, as long as it's in its powerband. The motor pulls hardest between 7000 rpm and the 9500-rpm redline; above or below that range, though, the power signs off abruptly. Consequently, gear-selection is critical, and while the RZ can keep up with most of the middleweights down a canyon road, it demands full rider-participation.

Riding the RZ quickly also requires keeping a close eye on the road surface. The rear shock is shy on rebound damping, and lets the bike pogo through bumpy turns, which can use up cornering clearance all too suddenly. Solidly mounted hardware touches down, too, before the folding footpegs: the sidestand and centerstand on the left, and the centerstand and pipe on the right. In short, the RZ is at its best on smooth, tightly twisting roads, where the rider can put the bike's agility and top-end rush to best use.

Equally agile, but far less twitchy, is

Continued

Suzuki's 550. In fact, the GS has the finest steering of any of the middleweights. The Suzuki's steering is quick, light and accurate at speed; it doesn't overreact, and provides all the feedback you could ask for. The GS's superb steering, as well as its compliant suspension and powerful (if numb-feeling) front brake, help vault the bike ahead of the FJ and RZ in terms of handling.

But the GS's lack of rebound damping in the rear, and a flat spot in the engine's midrange, just as surely place it behind the Kawasaki and the Honda. True, at moderate speeds the bike's suspension works well, absorbing most bumps before they can upset the chassis. Push the GS up to near-racing speeds, though, and mid-turn paving imperfections cause the rear end to wallow. On top of that, the throttle response goes soft between 5000 and 7000 rpm, leaving the rider with a narrow powerband to deal with, between about 8000 rpm and the 10,500-rpm redline. The GS can be ridden quickly, but like the RZ, it requires an attention to detail and careful gear selection.

And like the RZ, the GS encourages you not to test the limits of its cornering clearance. Before the footpegs touch the tarmac, and before you've run out of room on the tires' edges, the GS drags its sidestand tang on the left and its centerstand on the right. Most riders would prefer that the footpegs touch down first, because dragging solidly mounted pieces can, as in the GS's case, lever the wheels right off the ground.

A clear notch above the Suzuki comes Kawasaki's GPz550; in part because Kawasaki breathed new life into the GPz for '84, adding more horsepower and a new rear suspension, while the Suzuki remains almost entirely in '83 trim. Consequently, the GPz is quicker and faster now, and its engine is far more manageable than the GS's, or the RZ's, for that matter. The GPz, like the other middleweights, needs to be kept in the upper part of its rev range in order to launch away from turns, but it has midrange punch that the GS and RZ don't, and so

requires less shifting. And the GPz has the brakes to match its newfound speed; the RZ and FJ front brakes have just a shade more power, but the Kawasaki's has better feel and feedback.

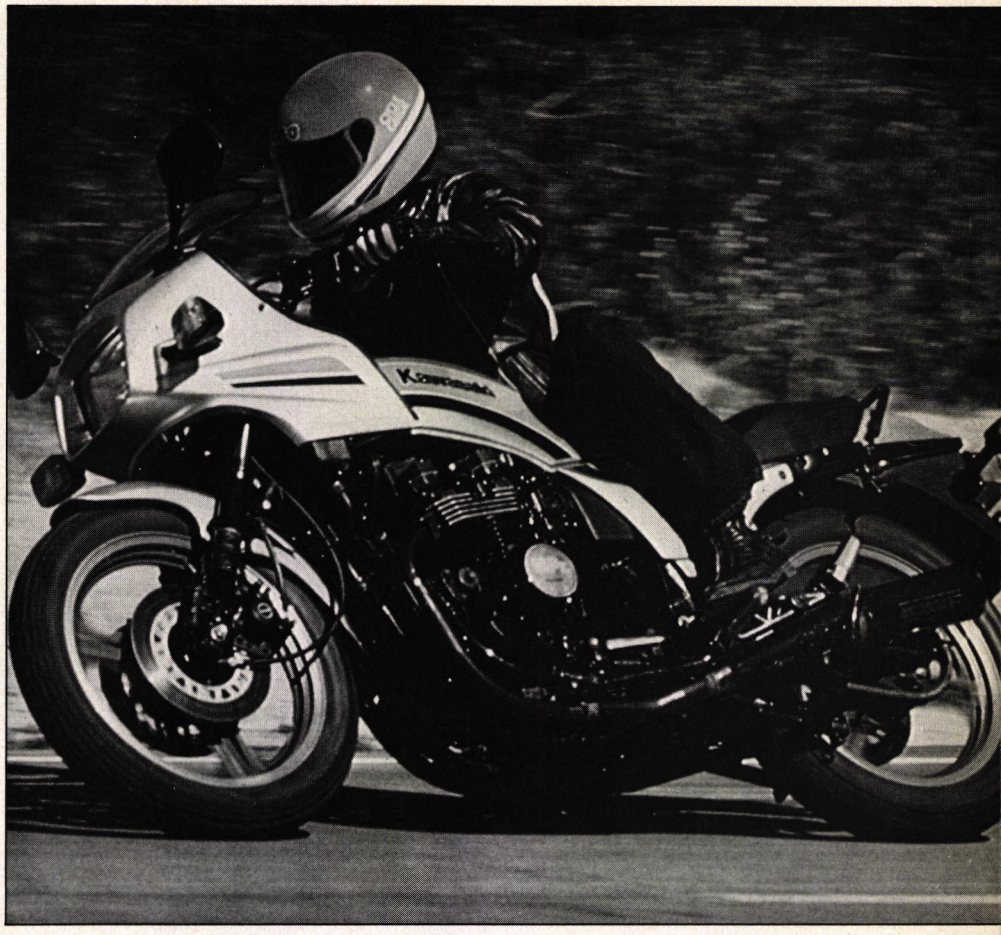
Kawasaki's GPz550 has something else some of the others don't, too: rear-suspension adjustability. The GS, RZ and FJ adjust for spring preload only in the rear, while the GPz—and Honda's VF500F—each offer four different rebound settings. Adjustability doesn't necessarily equal stability or compliance, though. Even with the rear set full-stiff, heavy riders can make the GPz wallow slightly through fast corners, and mid-turn paving irregularities upset this bike more easily than is the case with the other middleweights. Still, the GPz is traveling noticeably faster than the GS, RZ or FJ when such things happen.

In steering response, though, the GPz falls neatly between the sluggish FJ and the hyperquick RZ, while offering feedback and precision almost equal to the GS's. And the Kawasaki has better cornering clearance than RZ or GS, too; the folding footpegs are the first bits to touch, and they don't graze the ground until you're right out to the tires' edges.

To be sure, the GPz is a capable handler, the second-best among this crowd of contenders. But neither the GPz nor any of the others can equal the Honda VF500F's brilliance as a sportbike. The VF steers quickly and accurately, and responds instantly to the rider's touch. Yet, surprisingly enough, the bike remains completely stable through ultrafast bends. The RZ and GS might steer more quickly, but nothing matches the VF500F's confidence-building combination of agility and stability at speed.

The Interceptor's suspension also helps keep the bike on course over rippled pavement. The bike feels reassuringly taut, and transmits excellent road-feel without jolting the rider. Bumps don't affect it, and the bike refuses to wiggle or wallow. Plus, there's plenty of cornering clearance to allow full use of the tires, and the folding footpegs touch down first to give adequate warning.

Honda's VF has the broadest, most easily used powerband, too, some 4000 rpm wide, from 8000 rpm to the 12,000-rpm redline. That means gear/rpm matchup is less critical than with the other middleweights, so the Interceptor pilot can spend more time putting power to the pavement, and less time shifting. And if you come into a corner a little hot, you can rely on the brakes completely. The VF's front brake provides power



equal to the Yamahas' and feedback second to none. The VF also has the only anti-dive system that works; neither the GPz's nor the GS's reduces front-end dive during hard braking.

What the VF can do on the backroads borders on magic; what it does in town and on the freeway is another matter. The smooth-revving engine has plenty of low-end power and excellent throttle-response, and the suspension offers good small-bump compliance. Over larger paving imperfections, though, the ride turns a bit harsh; that, plus the bike's small size and tight riding position, relegates the VF to third, behind the GS and GPz, as an all-around streetbike.

Kawasaki's GPz, on the other hand, offers the best ergonomics, the best freeway ride, the smoothest motor and the most-

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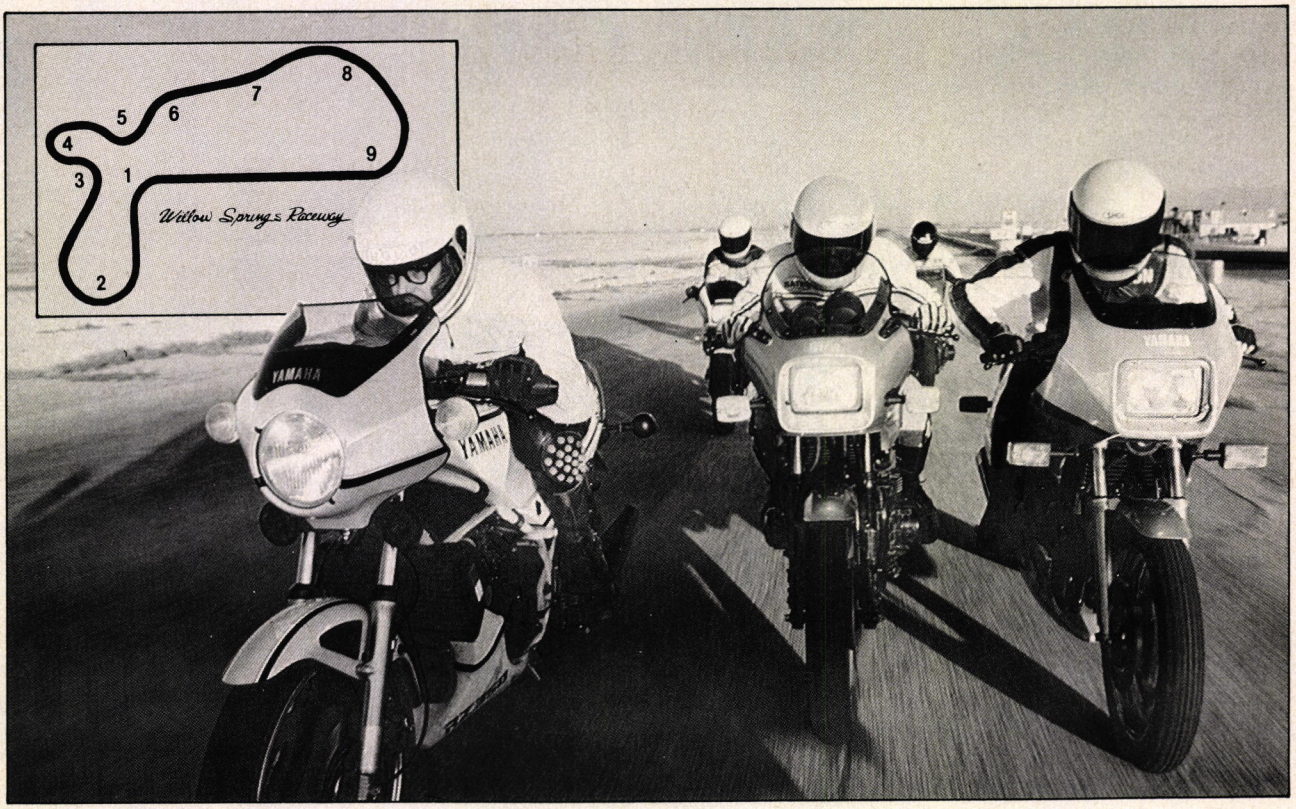
"Yeah, but what'll they do on the racetrack?..."



• With a collection of sportbikes as spectacular as these, it was inevitable that we go to the racetrack. Inevitable, because only within the precise confines of a closed-circuit road course, far from Buicks, Winnebagos and the police, can you find out in relative safety how a sportbike works at its limits.

Before we go any further, though, there are a couple of things you should know. First, riding on a racetrack—in this case, Willow Springs International Raceway—is not the same as riding fast on the street. Any racetrack places its own peculiar demands on motorcycles, and can magnify or obscure a bike's handling traits. Secondly, we can't tell you about the GS550ES's performance at the track; it went down hard in Turn Five on the second lap, and there was no replacement available in time to return to Willow. As a result, racetrack information wasn't figured into the outcome of our comparison test.

We *can* tell you about the other four, however. Yamaha's RZ350, for instance, simply was outgunned and outclassed at Willow, and turned the slowest lap times of the group. The little two-stroke doesn't have the power to keep up with the other middleweights down Willow's long straights and fast corners. And, as on the street, the RZ demands constant shifting to stay in its narrow powerband. The RZ also responds to unintentional inputs through the handlebar as willingly as to intentional ones, and its soft rear suspension lets the bike wallow and drag its stands through corners. Even so, the RZ was an emotional favorite at the track, because of the feeling of accomplishment that came from mastering it.

Unfortunately, the FJ, GPz and VF don't lend themselves to such convenient ranking, since they all turned nearly identical lap times. That might seem confusing, in light of the FJ's poor placing in the shootout, but it's mostly because Willow's layout puts a higher premium on acceleration than it does on agility. Consequently, on the track, the FJ can put its speed and superior brakes to good use, and its slow steering becomes less of a handicap. Indeed, the FJ can flat haul around Willow; it still wobbles at speeds over 100 mph, though, and lacks rebound damping in the rear. But the bike never gets so unruly that you have to back off; the same level of wobbling occurs whether you're approaching the ragged edge, or beyond it.

Kawasaki's GPz550 exhibits no such rude behavior at the track. The bike always is wonderfully predictable and stable, and the steering remains precise and accurate, even through corners at triple-digit speeds. The GPz never worries its rider, or gets ruffled if it runs out of cornering clearance. Instead, the Kawasaki equips its rider with the tools he needs to dismantle the racetrack, corner by corner. The GPz also produces less drama and requires less effort to ride quickly than the FJ.

But for low-effort/high-yield performance, the VF500F gets the nod. Everything about the VF—its quick, light steering, predictable, progressive brakes, and broad spread of power—is user-friendly, and demands less from the rider than do any of the other sporting middleweights. The VF can be pitched into a corner with little more than a thought, and its depth of ability helps make the rider feel instantly at home. Stuffing the exhaust crossover or the fairing hard into the pavement does upset the VF momentarily, but the bike always straightens itself out.

What separates the FJ, GPz and VF at the racetrack, then, has more to do with feel than with ultimate performance. On the track, what counts are lap times, and these three were almost inseparably close. But even though we left Willow Springs without being able to declare an overall winner, there's one consolation: If you decide to go racing on any one of the three—FJ600, GPz550 or VF500F—we figure *you* can be a winner.

—Charles Everitt

seamless carburetion. Such qualities make the GPz the most versatile of the sporting middleweights. Over most surfaces, the GS's suspension is as plush as the GPz's, and the bike's ergonomics are a close second. The Suzuki suffers, though, from a choppy freeway ride, the need for a lengthy warmup, and an inability to meter fuel accurately at small throttle-openings.

Well down from the GS come the two Yamahas, and it's their vibration, harsh overall ride and high level of mechanical noise that puts them there. Their suspensions jolt the rider over moderate-to-severe road-surface irregularities, and the Yamahas are noisier than any of the other three. The RZ also has an ill-shaped and poorly padded saddle, and a shortage of low-end power, making it the least streetable of the group.

But not the least desirable as a sportbike. These are sporting middleweights, and they'll be judged as such. And as a backroad bullet, the FJ600 places last in this comparison. The FJ is the quickest at the dragstrip, but it steers much too slowly, and wobbles at speed, both in a straight line and in corners. We went into this comparison wondering if the RZ really belonged; we came out of it wondering if the FJ did.

The RZ belongs because of its ability to keep pace with the other middleweights, and because of its bug-eyed, triple-distilled sporting focus. And it belongs in fourth because of its twitchiness, its narrow powerband and a lack of shock absorber rebound damping. In third place comes Suzuki's GS, a motorcycle with impeccable steering manners, but one in need of more midrange power and more rebound damping for its shock. Runner-up slot goes to the GPz, the best all-around bike and the second-best handler, so close to the VF that it hurts.

Which brings us to the winner of this sporting middleweight comparison. Simply put, the VF500F offers the best combination of maneuverability, stability and breadth of powerband of anything here. The Honda can be ridden faster, longer, than any of the others because it takes less effort and concentration to operate. In fact, the VF is the closest thing to a no-fault handler we've seen; it leaves the rider free to focus his concentration fully on the road, and gives him no quirks to compensate for.

That's why we crown the Honda VF500F as the king of the sporting middleweights. In the high-pressure, hard-riding world of canyon-charging, everything else is just second-best. •

VIEWPOINT:

After the Final Bell

The post-fight analysis; unanimous or split decision?

• Expecting the revamped GPz550 to fend off 1984 hardware is like chartering the Titanic for one more voyage. The GPz has long since been rammed amidships by bikes that are better on the racetrack and quicker on the dragstrip.

But you know what? I don't ride to work on a racetrack. And there are no timing lights between my house and Del Taco. That's why for the less glamorous, but more realistic duties of domestic life, my pick still is the Kawasaki GPz—by simple process of elimination. The Honda has a magic motor, but it's scaled to the average dwarf. After more than an hour in that saddle, I feel I'm developing joints where the human body isn't supposed to bend. Even the RZ leaves me more room, but it has so little low-end, I wouldn't *want* to spend an hour in its saddle. That leaves the GS and its midrange dead zone, and the FJ, which rattles like a herpetologist's pet house.

The GPz, on the other hand, is comfortable, smooth and has a powerband that's almost ideal. So, once again, the GPz is my choice for riding in the real world. I'll just have to keep a closer watch for icebergs. —*Ron Lawson*

• On the final day of testing, I made sure to ride the Honda last. I tried to come up with situations that would put the 500 at a disadvantage, to give the rest of the bikes the greatest chance, fair or not, to displace the VF from a sure first place. But when I got to the Miniceptor, all that effort seemed a fraud: There is the VF500. . .and then there are the others.

That doesn't mean riders who prefer any of the other middleweights have picked crippled, second-rate hardware. For all its quirks as a streetbike, the 600 might be the Box-Stock sleeper of 1984. And the RZ is every bit as exciting as the VF, but it's also more limited. The GPz and GS are thrilling, cutting-edge sportbikes, each a shade better than the VF in some ways, each a touch less finely honed as a backroad wrist-rocket. The differences between them all might be considered nothing more than that: differences. But not quite. There is one clear winner, and if declaring it triggers another deluge of "Honda Guide" mail, so be it. To hand out the Middleweight Championship of the World to anything other than the VF500F would be a lie.

— *Larry Works*

• I know, I know, the Honda wins. I'm not disputing that. The Interceptor is a jewel, and cramped ergonomics aside, it's the best sportbike I've ever ridden. But there's another bike in this bunch that leaves me grinning like a drunk with a new bottle: the RZ. The RZ is skittish, peaky and embarrassingly loud I couldn't care less. Once the tach needle sweeps past 6000 rpm and that obnoxious burbling exhaust note turns to a perfect-pitch howl, I'm having too much fun to think about how many neighbors I woke up this morning. When the little Yamaha hits its stride, all is forgiven.

Unfortunately, when the rest of these middleweights hit their stride, they'll leave the RZ rider straining to keep up, his hands and feet a blur trying to keep the little Yamaha in its powerband. If you're looking for the quickest and easiest way between two points, the RZ isn't it. But for me, it is the most fun, and each of the others—even the VF500—seems deadly serious by comparison. So the rest of these guys can take the little Interceptor. I'll just slip the RZ into a brown paper bag and sneak out the back way. —*Jim Miller*

• Everyone on the staff agreed that I'd undoubtedly pick the RZ350 as my first choice in this comparison. After all, they chided, I used to roadrace RD350s, and since this liquid-cooled, single-shock beauty is at least twice the bike that my old racers ever promised to be, the staff consensus was that I would, on its roadrace merits alone, position the RZ in first place.

But I fooled them all. Sure, the RZ is fun on a racetrack, and it should establish a race record beyond that of its RD predecessors, but I don't care—I'm not a racer anymore. A fast ride down the asphalt guantlet toward the finish line isn't as important to me now as is adaptability to the street. And to that end, the RZ falls two strokes short. I've converted; give me a valve-and-cam engine anyday. So, without trying to sound like a broken record, I'll pick the VF500F; it's the best sportbike, in or out of its class, on or off the racetrack.

But, I can't get the RZ out of my heart, because for club racing, there is nothing better than an RD-based Yamaha. I know, I've been there.

—*Dain Gingerelli*

Continued

VF500F

Nits:

- Fuel filler hole is too small.
- Fork aircaps aren't interconnected.
- Radiator must be removed to adjust the valves.
- Speedometer is extremely optimistic.

Picks:

- Handgrips are soft, with a comfortable pattern.
- Well-thought-out switches on handlebars.
- Spin-on oil filter is easily accessible.

GPz550

Nits:

- Valve adjustment requires removing cams.
- Warning lights on tank difficult to read.

Picks:

- Fork legs interconnected for air adjustment.
- Rear fender has convenient bungee hooks.

GS550ES

Nits:

- Fuel filler hole is too small.
- Fork aircaps aren't interconnected.
- Hard, ribbed grips are uncomfortable.
- Handlebar switches are inconvenient to use.

Picks:

- Hydraulic preload adjuster is accessible.
- Accurate fuel gauge.

RZ350

Nits:

- Ribbed, slightly barrel-shaped grips are uncomfortable.
- Fuel filler hole is too small.
- Fork aircaps aren't interconnected.

Picks:

- Self-canceling turnsignals.

FJ600

Nits:

- Ribbed, slightly barrel-shaped grips are uncomfortable.
- No aircaps on fork.
- Adjustable handlebars are pinned in place.

Picks:

- Fuel gauge is accurate.
- Self-canceling turnsignals.

CYCLE GUIDE SPECIFICATIONS

Honda VF500F Interceptor

IMPORTER		American Honda Motor Co. Inc. 100 West Alondra Blvd. Gardena, California 90247
SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE		$2898
ENGINE	**Type**	liquid-cooled four-stroke 90-degree tandem vee-four
	Valve arrangement	double overhead camshafts, four valves per cylinder
	Port arrangement	
	Bore and stroke	60.0mm x 44.0mm
	Displacement	497.6cc
	Compression ratio	11.0:1
	Engine redline	12,000 rpm
	Carburetion	four 29mm Keihin constant-vacuum
	Air filter	disposable paper element
	Lubrication	wet sump
	Starting system	electric only
	Ignition	transistorized breakerless
	Charging system	12-volt; 260-watt alternator, voltage regulator/rectifier, 12-ampere-hour battery
DRIVETRAIN	**Primary drive**	straight-cut gears; 2.057:1 ratio
	Clutch	wet, multi-plate
	Crankshaft-to-jackshaft drive	
	Jackshaft-to-transmission drive	
	Final drive	#530 O-ring chain (⅝-in. pitch, ⅜-in. width); 2.933:1 (44/15) ratio

Gear	Internal gear ratio	Overall gear ratio	MPH per 1000 RPM
I	3.308	19.960	3.70
II	2.353	14.198	5.20
III	1.850	11.163	6.62
IV	1.545	9.322	7.93
V	1.333	8.043	9.19
VI	1.154	6.963	10.61

SUSPENSION/WHEEL TRAVEL	**Front**	Showa air-spring, 37mm stanchion tube diameter, brake-actuated hydraulic anti- dive/5.6 in. (142mm)
	Rear	single Showa air-spring shock, 4-position adjustable rebound damping/4.4 in. (112mm)
BRAKES	**Front**	dual single-action hydraulic calipers, 9.8-in. (250mm) effective disc diameter
	Rear	single-action hydraulic caliper, 10.6-in. (270mm) effective disc diameter
TIRES	**Front**	110/90-16 54H Bridgestone Mag Mopus G511 tubeless
	Rear	110/90-18 61H Bridgestone Mag Mopus G512 tubeless
DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES	**Weight**	419 lbs. (190.0kg)
	Weight distribution	48.2% front, 51.8% rear
	Gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR)	790 lbs. (358kg)
	Load capacity (with full fuel tank)	344 lbs. (156kg)
	Wheelbase	55.3 to 56.8 in. (1404 to 1442mm)
	Seat height	31.5 in. (801mm)
	Handlebar width	adjustable from 26.6 to 28.0 in. (675 to 710mm)
	Footpeg height	13.9 in. (354mm)
	Ground clearance	5.6 in. (141mm), at exhaust crossover
	Steering head angle	27.0 degrees from vertical
	Front wheel trail	3.98 in. (101mm)
	Frame	box-section and tubular mild steel, double front downtubes
	Oil capacity	3.2 qt. (3.0/)
	Fuel tank	steel, 4.5 gal. (17.0/), including 1.2 gal. (4.5/) reserve
	Instrumentation	speedometer, odometer, tripmeter resettable to zero, tachometer, coolant temperature gauge
PERFORMANCE	**Fuel consumption range**	33 to 48 mpg (14 to 20 km/l)
	Average fuel consumption	40 mpg (17 km/l)
	Cruising range, maximum	149 to 216 miles (240 to 348km)
	Cruising range, reserve only	40 to 58 miles (64 to 93km)
	Speedometer error, 30 mph indicated	27 mph actual
	Speedometer error, 55 mph indicated	49 mph actual
	Best 1/4-mile acceleration	12.484 sec., 106.00 mph (171 km/h)
	Top speed (observed)	126 mph (203 km/h)
	Stopping distance from 30 mph	30 ft. (9.1m)
	Stopping distance from 60 mph	123 ft. (37.5m)
WARRANTY:		12 months, unlimited mileage
AVAILABLE COLORS:		red-and-white; blue-and-white

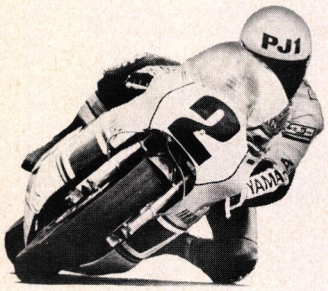
Kawasaki GPz550	Suzuki GS550ES	Yamaha FJ600	Yamaha RZ350
Kawasaki Motors Corp. 2009 East Edinger Ave. Santa Ana, California 92711	U.S. Suzuki Motor Corp. 3251 East Imperial Highway Brea, California 92621	Yamaha Motor Corp. U.S.A. 6555 Katella Ave. Cypress, California 90630	Yamaha Motor Corp. U.S.A. 6555 Katella Ave. Cypress, California 90630
$2899	$3099	$2899	$2399
four-stroke transverse vertical four double overhead camshafts	four-stroke transverse vertical four double overhead camshafts, four valves per cylinder	four-stroke transverse vertical four double overhead camshafts	liquid-cooled two-stroke transverse vertical twin one reed-valve-controlled intake, four main transfers, one booster transfer, one variable-height exhaust
58.0mm x 52.4mm 553.8cc 10.0:1 10,500 rpm four 27mm Teikei Kikaki constant-vacuum disposable paper element wet sump electric only transistorized breakerless 12-volt; 260-watt alternator, voltage regulator/rectifier, 12-ampere-hour battery	60.0mm x 50.6mm 572.3cc 9.8:1 10,500 rpm dual 30mm two-barrel Mikuni constant-vacuum disposable paper element wet sump electric only transistorized breakerless 12-volt; 310-watt alternator, voltage regulator/rectifier, 10-ampere-hour battery	58.5mm x 55.7mm 598.8cc 10.0:1 10,500 rpm four 32mm Mikuni constant-vacuum disposable paper element wet sump electric only transistorized breakerless 12-volt; 240-watt alternator, voltage regulator/rectifier, 12-ampere-hour battery	64.0mm x 54.0mm 347.4cc 6.0:1 9,500 rpm two 26mm Mikuni slide/needle washable oiled foam element oil injection primary kick transistorized breakerless 12-volt; 196-watt alternator, voltage regulator/rectifier, 5.5-ampere-hour battery
wet, multi-plate inverted-tooth chain; 1.174:1 ratio straight-cut gears; 2.500:1 ratio #520 O-ring chain (⅝-in. pitch, ¼-in. width); 2.375:1 (38/16) ratio	helical gears; 1.978:1 ratio wet, multi-plate #530 O-ring chain (⅝-in. pitch, ⅜-in. width); 3.429:1 (48/14) ratio	wet, multi-plate inverted-tooth chain; 1.048:1 ratio straight-cut gears; 2.321:1 ratio #530 O-ring chain (⅝-in. pitch, ⅜-in. width); 2.813:1 (45/16) ratio	straight-cut gears; 2.870:1 ratio wet, multi-plate #520 O-ring chain (⅝-in. pitch, ¼-in. width); 2.353:1 (40/17) ratio
Internal gear ratio / Overall gear ratio / MPH per 1000 RPM	Internal gear ratio / Overall gear ratio / MPH per 1000 RPM	Internal gear ratio / Overall gear ratio / MPH per 1000 RPM	Internal gear ratio / Overall gear ratio / MPH per 1000 RPM
2.571 / 17.923 / 4.18	2.667 / 18.083 / 4.16	2.733 / 18.696 / 4.00	2.571 / 17.362 / 4.23
1.778 / 12.391 / 6.04	1.778 / 12.055 / 6.24	1.947 / 13.320 / 5.61	1.778 / 12.003 / 6.12
1.381 / 9.625 / 7.78	1.381 / 9.364 / 8.03	1.545 / 10.571 / 7.07	1.318 / 8.900 / 8.25
1.125 / 7.841 / 9.55	1.174 / 7.960 / 9.45	1.240 / 8.482 / 8.81	1.083 / 7.315 / 10.04
0.962 / 6.702 / 11.18	1.045 / 7.089 / 10.61	1.036 / 7.084 / 10.55	0.962 / 6.492 / 11.32
0.852 / 5.973 / 12.62	0.957 / 6.486 / 11.59	0.871 / 5.957 / 12.54	0.889 / 6.001 / 12.24
Showa air-spring, 36mm stanchion tube diameter, brake-actuated hydraulic anti-dive/6.2 in. (158mm) single Showa shock, 4-position adjustable rebound damping, 17mm spring preload range/5.0 in. (128mm)	Showa air-spring, 37mm stanchion tube diameter, brake-actuated hydraulic anti-dive/5.6 in. (143mm) single Showa shock, 13mm spring preload range/ 5.4 in. (138mm)	Kayaba, 36mm stanchion tube diameter/6.2 in. (158mm) single Yamaha shock, 5-position adjustable spring preload/5.1 in. (130mm)	Showa air-spring, 35mm stanchion tube diameter/5.2 in. (132mm) single Yamaha shock, 5-position adjustable spring preload/4.1 in. (104mm)
dual single-action hydraulic calipers, 10.1-in. (256mm) effective disc diameter single-action hydraulic caliper, 10.1-in. (256mm) effective disc diameter	dual double-action hydraulic calipers, 10.3-in. (262mm) effective disc diameter double-action hydraulic caliper, 9.6-in. (245mm) effective disc diameter	dual double-action hydraulic calipers, 10.4-in. (264mm) effective disc diameter double-action hydraulic caliper, 10.6-in. (268mm) effective disc diameter	dual single-action hydraulic calipers, 10.4-in. (265mm) effective disc diameter double-action hydraulic caliper, 10.5-in. (267mm) effective disc diameter
100/90-18 56H Bridgestone Mag Mopus L303 tubeless 120/80-18 62H Bridgestone Mag Mopus G508 tubeless	100/90-16 54H Dunlop F14 tubeless 110/90-18 61H Dunlop K130 tubeless	90/90-18 51H Dunlop F14 tubeless 110/90-18 61H Dunlop K130 tubeless	90/90-18 51H Yokohama F-202 tubeless 110/80-18 58H Yokohama R-202 tubeless
436 lbs. (197.8kg) 49.1% front, 50.9% rear 870 lbs. (395kg) 405 lbs. (184kg) 55.8 to 57.1 in. (1418 to 1450mm) 31.0 in. (788mm) 25.6 in. (650mm) 15.3 in. (388mm) 6.4 in. (162mm), at header-pipe clamp 26.0 degrees from vertical 3.74 in. (95mm) tubular mild steel, double front downtubes 3.2 qt. (3.0/) steel, 4.8 gal. (18.0/), including 1.2 gal. (4.5/) reserve speedometer, odometer, tripmeter resettable to zero, tachometer, voltmeter, LCD fuel gauge, LCD/bulb- type monitor system	444 lbs. (201.4kg) 48.9% front, 51.1% rear 895 lbs. (406kg) 421 lbs. (191kg) 55.8 to 56.9 in. (1417 to 1445mm) 31.1 in. (791mm) 26.8 in. (680mm) 13.9 in. (352mm) 6.1 in. (155mm), at exhaust crossover 27.0 degrees from vertical 3.98 in. (101mm) box-section and tubular mild steel, double front downtubes 2.5 qt. (2.4/) steel, 5.0 gal. (19.0/), including 0.8 gal. (3.0/) reserve speedometer, odometer, tripmeter resettable to zero, tachometer, fuel gauge, digital gear indicator	435 lbs. (197.3kg) 47.6% front, 52.4% rear 873 lbs. (396kg) 405 lbs. (184kg) 55.7 to 56.8 in. (1415 to 1443mm) 31.3 in. (794mm) 26.6 in. (675mm) 12.8 in. (326mm) 6.4 in. (162mm), at centerstand 26.0 degrees from vertical 4.17 in. (106mm) tubular mild steel, double front downtubes 3.2 qt. (3.0/) steel, 5.4 gal. (20.5/), including 0.8 gal. (3.0/) reserve speedometer, odometer, tripmeter resettable to zero, tachometer, fuel gauge	357 lbs. (161.9kg) 46.1% front, 53.9% rear 825 lbs. (374kg) 435 lbs. (197kg) 53.8 to 55.0 in. (1367 to 1397mm) 31.3 in. (794mm) 26.5 in. (673mm) 13.3 in. (338mm) 6.6 in. (167mm), at centerstand 26.0 degrees from vertical 3.78 in. (96mm) tubular mild steel, double front downtubes 1.8 qt. (1.7/) steel, 5.4 gal. (20.5/), including 1.1 gal. (4.0/) reserve speedometer, odometer, tripmeter resettable to zero, tachometer, coolant temperature gauge
32 to 59 mpg (14 to 25 km/l) 42 mpg (18 km/l) 154 to 283 miles (248 to 455km) 38 to 71 miles (61 to 114km) 29 mph actual 52 mph actual 12.559 sec., 105.38 mph (170 km/h) 123 mph (198 km/h) 33 ft. (10.1m) 136 ft. (41.5m)	30 to 51 mpg (13 to 22 km/l) 39 mpg (17 km/l) 150 to 255 miles (241 to 410km) 24 to 41 miles (39 to 66km) 29 mph actual 53 mph actual 12.675 sec., 103.68 mph (167 km/h) 123 mph (198 km/h) 29 ft. (8.8m) 137 ft. (41.8m)	32 to 50 mpg (14 to 21 km/l) 40 mpg (17 km/l) 173 to 270 miles (278 to 434km) 26 to 40 miles (41 to 64km) 29 mph actual 52 mph actual 12.468 sec., 105.63 mph (170 km/h) 126 mph (203 km/h) 32 ft. (9.8m) 129 ft. (39.3m)	26 to 53 mpg (11 to 23 km/l) 35 mpg (15 km/l) 140 to 286 miles (225 to 460km) 29 to 58 miles (47 to 93km) 29 mph actual 52 mph actual 13.529 sec., 97.61 mph (157 km/h) 111 mph (179 km/h) 30 ft. (9.1m) 122 ft. (37.2m)
12 months, unlimited mileage	12 months, unlimited mileage	12 months, unlimited mileage	12 months, unlimited mileage
Firecracker Red, Quartz Silver	blue-and-white only	Quartz Silver with Stormy Red only	Competition Yellow; Stormy Red with Silky White

"It's amazing to see what people use to lubricate their motorcycle chains. These aren't sewing machines or gate hinges, but expensive drive chains. Blue Label, PJ1's chain lube with synthetic sperm oil, gives true high mileage protection against wear, stretch and corrosion for standard and O ring type chains. Blue Label goes on thin for deep penetration and evaporates quickly, leaving a tough coating that won't fly off! Blue Label will keep O rings soft and pliable. You should see how fast those other oils deteriorate rubber O rings, allowing dirt to get to the rollers.

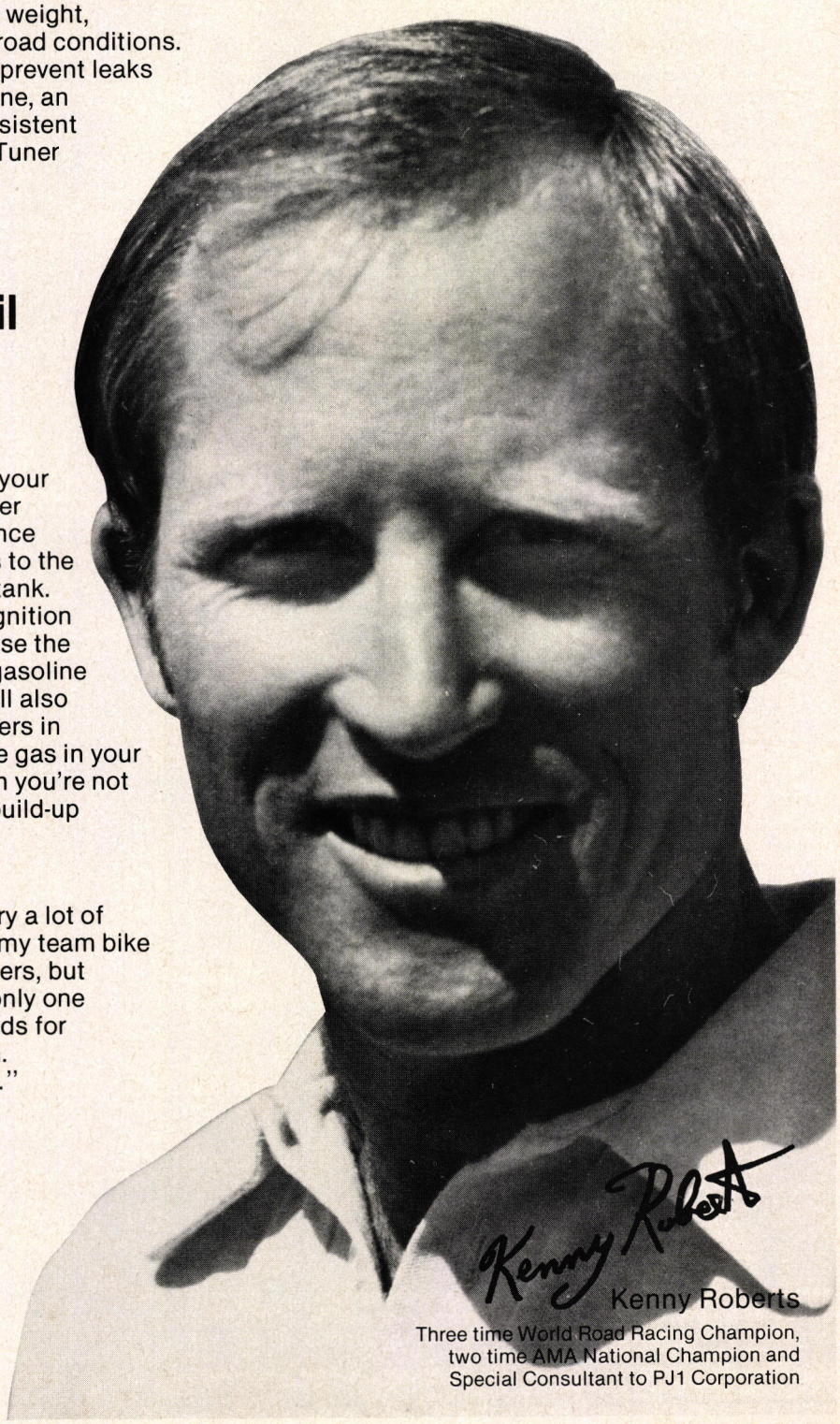
Production bikes don't handle like my Formula I racer, but you can improve response and handling with PJ1 Fork Tuner. PJ1 comes in eight different thicknesses to tune your ride to combined bike and rider weight, temperature changes and road conditions. Fork Tuner swells seals to prevent leaks and contains organosiloxane, an antifoaming agent, for consistent damping action. PJ1 Fork Tuner is the trick answer for rear shock performance too.

"There's only one oil I endorse. PJ1."

Put today's lower octane gasoline in your bike and you can kiss your horsepower goodbye! To get performance back, add PJ1 Octane Plus to the gas every time you fill the tank. Octane Plus has point of ignition buffers, allowing you to raise the octane level of any pump gasoline with complete safety. You'll also appreciate the gas stabilizers in Octane Plus. They keep the gas in your tank from going stale when you're not riding and prevent gum and varnish build-up in the carburetors and fuel system.



Look, I carry a lot of names on my team bike and leathers, but there's only one that stands for lubrication. That's PJ1."



Kenny Roberts

Three time World Road Racing Champion, two time AMA National Champion and Special Consultant to PJ1 Corporation

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GUIDE LINES

Cycle Guide's Monthly Chronicle of Scoops, Tips, Rumors and Hard Facts

BY JOE KRESS

COMING SOON

• Cagiva officially is in the U.S. market. Six models are available right now through Cagiva's new American subsidiary, Cagiva North America, with nine more 1985 models to be added soon. The '84s now in this country are 125cc and 250cc motocross and enduro bikes, and a 350cc trials bike. The Ducati-powered streetbikes, which will range in displacement from 350cc up to 1000cc will be designated '85's, as will a 350cc four-stroke dual-purpose bike.

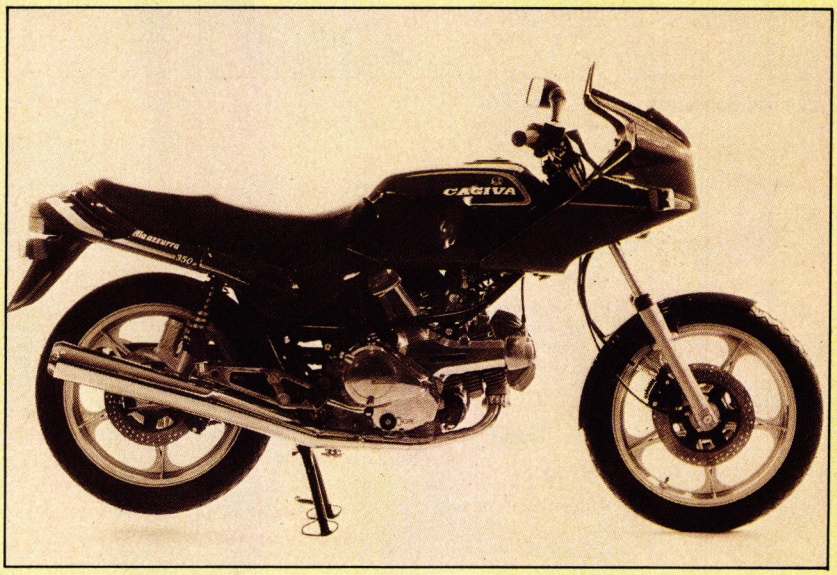
• Cagiva's smallest Ala Azzurra, like all of that firm's streetbikes, is powered by a 90-degree, air-cooled Ducati-built twin, but the chassis and bodywork are by Cagiva. The Ala Azzurra line, which will include 650cc and 900cc bikes, gives added choices to the sport rider looking to Europe for a moto-fix.

• But while those Ala Azzurra streetbikes are the result of Cagiva/Ducati collaboration, the company's motocrossers are not. Bikes in this category, such as the liquid-cooled WMX250 and WMX125, are powered by Cagiva engines mounted in Cagiva frames.

• Cagiva's '85 American lineup also will include the Elefant series of dual-purpose bikes, on/off-roaders powered by air-cooled Ducati twins. Although the 750cc version introduced in Europe won't make it to the U.S., two other models will. The North American mini-herd will be made up of a 350 and a 650, both featuring a square-tube frame, Soft Damp single-shock rear suspension and tank-mounted turnsignals. Those three versions of the Elefant will most likely be joined by one more: It's expected Cagiva will build special 1000cc models to compete in the prestigious 7000-mile Paris-to-Dakar rally. A good showing in that arena, as BMW has learned, can pay big sales dividends in the home market.

• But one Cagiva that will be available in this country is already a rally winner. The dual-purpose 350cc Ala Rossa is this year's champion of the Iceland Rally. The Ala Rossa's two-valve, OHC engine mounts in a conventional double-downtube cradle frame, with Cagiva's racing-style Soft Damp rear suspension matched to a Marzocchi-built fork. Familiar names of other European equipment suppliers, such as Brembo and Dell'Orto, also show up on this bike's spec sheet.

• Another Italian manufacturer has just released a new bike in a style it hasn't offered for years: Benelli's 125E is an enduro bike. The new single-shocker is powered by a liquid-cooled 125cc two-stroke, and employs a separate oil tank and pump for its lubrication needs. The little six-speed 125 whips up a reported 20 horsepower.



Ducati-powered Ala Azzurra 350 is just a preview of what's to come in '85

Cagiva's streetbike lineup will include 900s next year.

The WMX-series of liquid-cooled motocrossers is a strictly in-house project

With Cagiva-built engines providing all the punch needed.

• But if a Benelli enduro bike is rare, consider the West German-built WIWA. This is just the second year for the company, which limits itself to production of roadrace hardware. Last year's bikes were all powered by Yamaha

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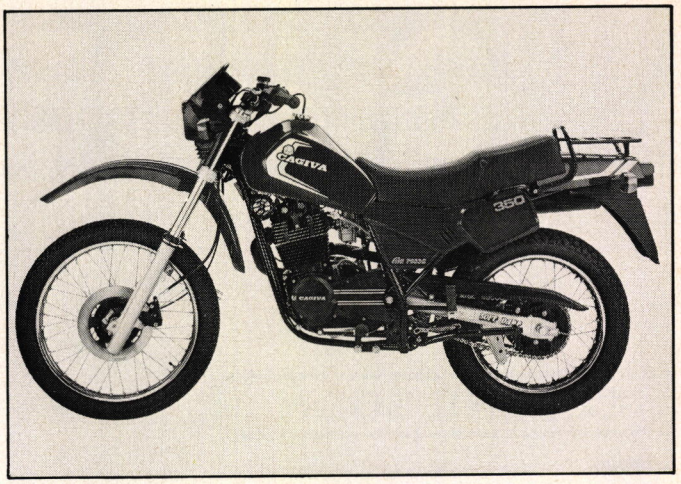
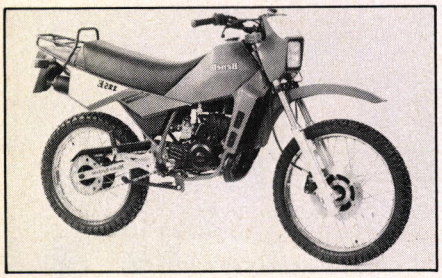
Ducati-powered Elefant will be an '85

And for the U.S. it'll be a 650, too.



Cagiva's first full lineup for United States has just one d-p bike included

And this is it—the Ala Rossa 350.

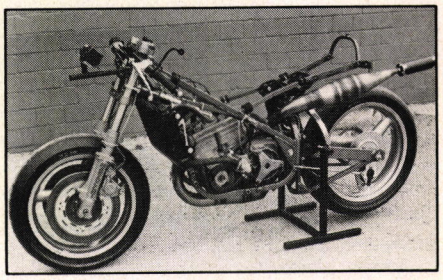


Newest two-stroke Italian off-roader

Puts Benelli back into enduros.

250cc and 350cc engines, but now the company also offers Rotax-propelled versions. The '84 WIWA RX4 is built around an all-aluminum, square-section-tube frame that accepts the liquid-cooled Rotax tandem-twin powerplant. And it doesn't seem as if budget was a concern when it came time to pick chassis components for this racer. The RX4 uses a Marzocchi magnesium-alloy fork, Brembo Goldline brakes and Campagnolo all-magnesium wheels.

• And on the subject of rare bikes, if you happen to spot a uniformed rider coming at you



Second-edition racer from West Germany

This time using Rotax power.

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Specifications subject to change without notice. Availability may be limited. Kawasaki believes in riding safely. Check local laws before you ride. Member AMA and MS

HARD CASH:

Kawasaki's Ticket To Ride

"How'd you like to take her for a little spin? . . ."

• From a purely logical point of view, it's a wonder that any motorcycle has been sold in the past few years. Think about it: Recently, riders have been expected to sign on the dotted line and start making the payments on motorcycles without having done more than testing the saddle and fiddling with the controls in the showroom. The purchase decision has, in many cases, become a question of buy it now, try it later . . . or forget it. Getting a demonstration ride before you forked over the cash was, frequently, out of the question, just as preposterous as asking to try on the salesman's underwear; such things just aren't done.

Or weren't done, anyway. Things are changing, and test rides of new machines by the buying public are no longer taboo. Yamaha has flirted with the concept, Harley-Davidson launched its SuperRide program this year, and now Kawasaki has its Ticket To Ride. Of the three, Kawasaki's program is perhaps the most ambitious: The company leases a racetrack and the demo rides are laps of the course. But then, Kawasaki's image is performance—and what better place is there than a racetrack to showcase it?

The initial Ticket To Ride was staged in late March at Riverside Raceway in Southern California. A rider first had to sign up at a dealership for the bike he wanted to test. A $10 refundable deposit got him his ticket, then he showed up at the track on the appointed day and got his ride. Kawasaki had every streetbike in its '84 lineup available at the track, and as might be expected, the company's sportbikes got the most attention. All day the lines were longest for rides on the Ninjas, Turbos and GPzs. Riders were let out on the track for five laps, with a pacer at the front of the pack and another at the rear to keep enthusiasm levels in check. There were strict warnings about excessive speeds, wheelies or any other potentially dangerous behavior; the only mishap of the day took place in the pits when a KLR600 fell over during kickstarting.

This was Kawasaki's first test-ride program for the public; according to company officials, it won't be the last. The public's response was greater than Kawasaki anticipated, and more than 400 riders showed up that first day at Riverside. In fact, it quickly became obvious that for everyone who came to ride, the five laps would have to be shortened to four laps, which turned into three and finally, two. It didn't seem to matter, though. Reportedly, the one-day program resulted in more than 100 motorcycle sales.

What does one pilot program in Southern California mean to riders in the rest of the country? The answer should be obvious: Test rides are again becoming a part of the motorcycle sales process. Kawasaki has proven that the idea works, that it can be done and the results are positive. And that's the real bottom line. Someone is far more likely to buy a bike after riding it, instead of just fantasizing about that ride in a showroom. Already, Kawasaki is planning similar programs on racetracks across the country. The customer's Ticket To Ride could soon become Kawasaki's ticket to increased sales—with good reason.

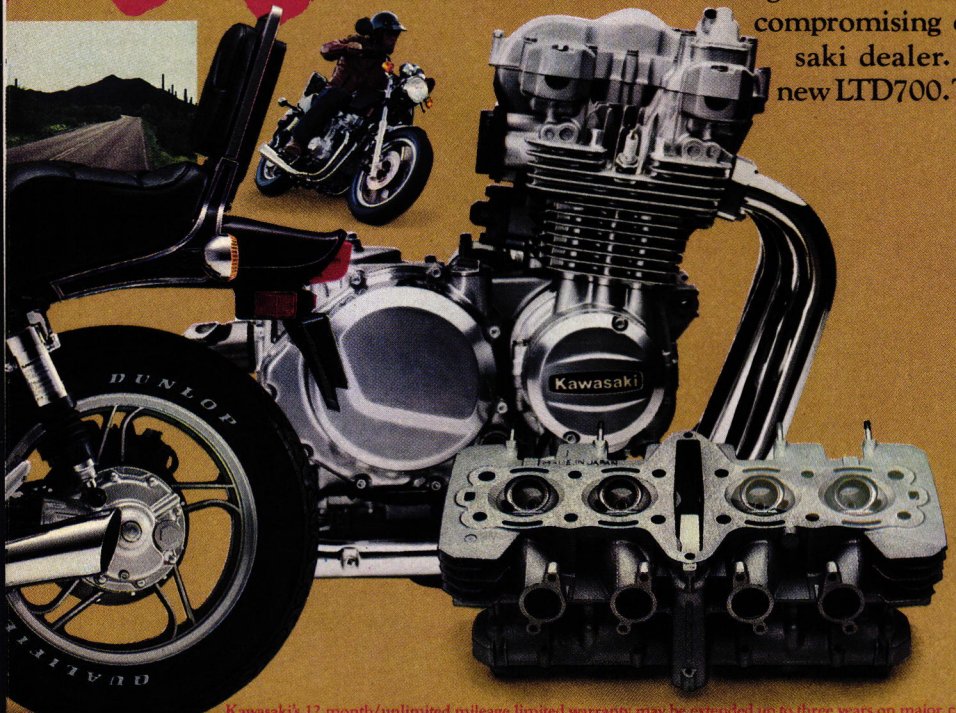
—Joe Kress

Continued

JAL, UNTIL YOU START THE ENGINE.

700

a boulevard or cruise across the continent. Check the new seat, low slung, plush... and comfortable for a passenger. The LTD700 is lower and sleeker in 1984. Man and machine mesh more closely, making it harder than ever to tell where the machine ends and the man begins. Take the first step now. Commit yourself to the uncompromising excellence you deserve. See your Kawasaki dealer. He'll show you the new LTD700. The rest is up to you. Kawasaki Let the good times roll.



Kawasaki's 12 month/unlimited mileage limited warranty may be extended up to three years on major components with the Kawasaki Backup System. See your dealer for details.

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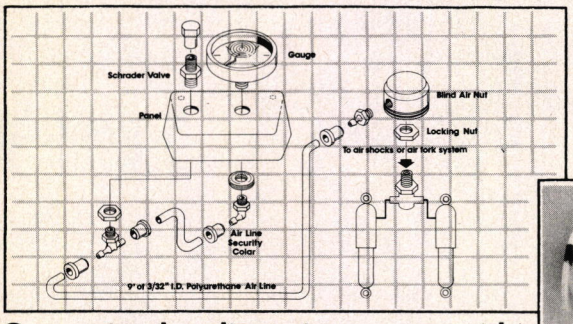

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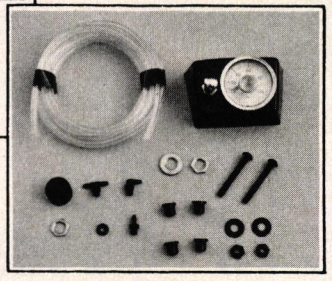

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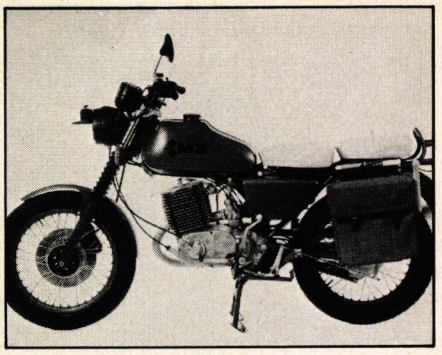

The very latest in Eastern Bloc patrol

MZ's military-use two-wheeler.

astride an MZ ETZ250, consider yourself seriously lost. The ETZ is the latest mount of the East German army. It's powered by a 243cc single and, in standard military fashion, this 21-horsepower charger doesn't have a speck of chrome on it. If you do happen to spot one of these machines, though, turn around and head for the border.

FEDERAL CASES

• California's Air Resources Board (CARB) has dropped its proposed 1-gram-per-kilometer hydrocarbon emissions limit for Class III (over 280cc) motorcycles, slated to have gone into effect next year. CARB replaced its original emissions proposal with a revised, 1.4-gram-per-kilometer corporate average standard. The new standard takes effect with the 1986 model year, and will continue through '87. Manufacturers selling fewer than 5000 units annually in California are exempt from the 1.4-gram requirement. Companies in this category, such as Harley-Davidson and BMW, need only meet California's current 2.5-gram standard through 1987.

• According to the AMA, misapplication of 1982's Surface Transportation Assistance Act is widespread. That law, best known for its nickel-per-gallon increase in the federal gasoline tax, also directed states to open high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) and carpool lanes to motorcycle use if federal highway funds were used to construct those roads. Of the 12 states falling under the Act's directive, only Washington has opened its HOV lanes to motorcycles. The other states employ a loophole in the legislation that allows motorcycles to be excluded from using the lanes if the states certify that bikes create a safety hazard. Washington, however, has experienced no problems and no bike-related accidents since opening HOV lanes on Interstate 5 in the Seattle area to motorcycles. Currently, the AMA is working with Sen. Steven Symms (R-Idaho), chairman of the Senate Transportation Subcommittee, to resolve the problem in the remaining 11 states.

• In the plus column, the list of states starting self-funded rider training programs continues to grow. In Georgia, SB 450, which would establish a rider-ed course, and HB 1568, the legislation to increase annual registration

Continued

charges by $2 to fund the course, await only the governor's signature. Likewise, Virginia's HB 932, that state's rider-ed proposal, has passed through the Virginia Assembly, and needs only the governor's signature to become law. In Pennsylvania, HB 1209, legislation for yet another new rider-ed program, passed the Pennsylvania Senate but was sent back to the House because of amendments made while the bill was in the Senate. The bill had been changed to not only set up a self-funded rider training course (paid for by a $2 increase in the state's license fee), but also to allow use of helmet-mounted speakers and to schedule all annual motorcycle safety inspections in Pennsylvania during the riding season.

• And life just became a little easier for motorcycling nature lovers in the Chicago area. Officials for Cook County Forest Preserve have opened eight Chicago-area parks to access by street-legal motorcycles. Some of the parks had been off-limits to all motorcyclists for as long as one decade. Special motorcycle-only parking areas have been established in the eight forest preserves; but motorcycles will not be permitted beyond those special parking lots. County officials did indicate, however, that the easing of regulations could be the first step toward dropping all motorcycle restrictions in the parks. In addition to the eight county parks just reopened to motorcyclists, Cook County has 217 other forest preserves, none of which has any restriction to access by street-legal motorcycles.

• And New Jersey has removed one of its restrictions for *off-road* motorcyclists, young ones at least. The state's Department of Law and Public Safety recently changed rules that had made motocross racing in New Jersey almost impossible for young motorcycle riders. Now, riders from 10-13 years old will be allowed to compete in special youth classes limited to 85cc machines, while New Jersey riders from 14-17 will be allowed to compete against amateur racers 18 and older. Previously, the state's laws prohibited competition by anyone under the age of 14, and riders 14-17 years old weren't allowed to race with riders over 18.

HARD CASH

• The double-barrel effect of a slow sales year and the ITC tariff showed up in a just-released report on '84 motorcycle imports. According to figures compiled by Foreign Trade Services, only 15,259 Japanese bikes with engine displacements between 491cc and 790cc were brought into this country during January '84. That total is down 50.4 percent from the '83 numbers. And only 1,021 bikes with engine displacements greater than 750cc were brought into the U.S. during the month reported; the '83 figure was 9,340. As the manufacturers are painfully aware, those lower numbers translate into fewer dollars. During January '84 less than $30 million worth of motorcycles 490cc and larger came into the U.S.,

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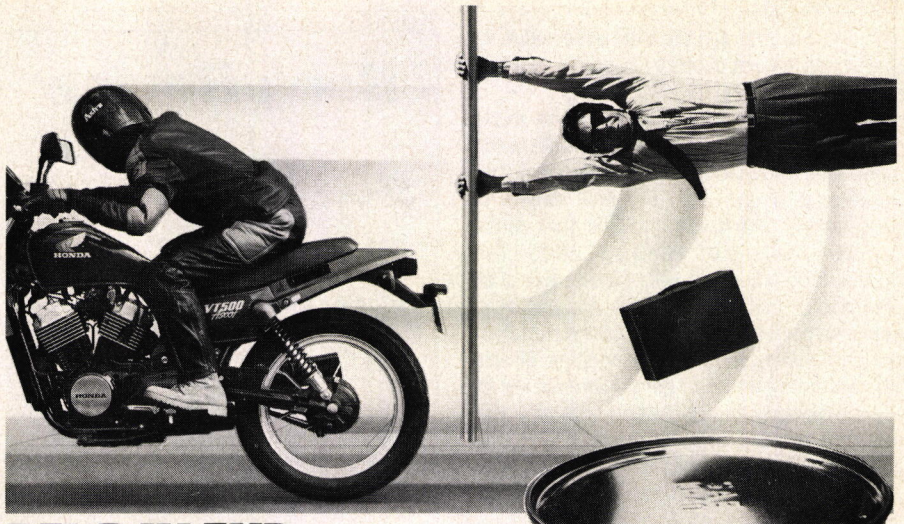

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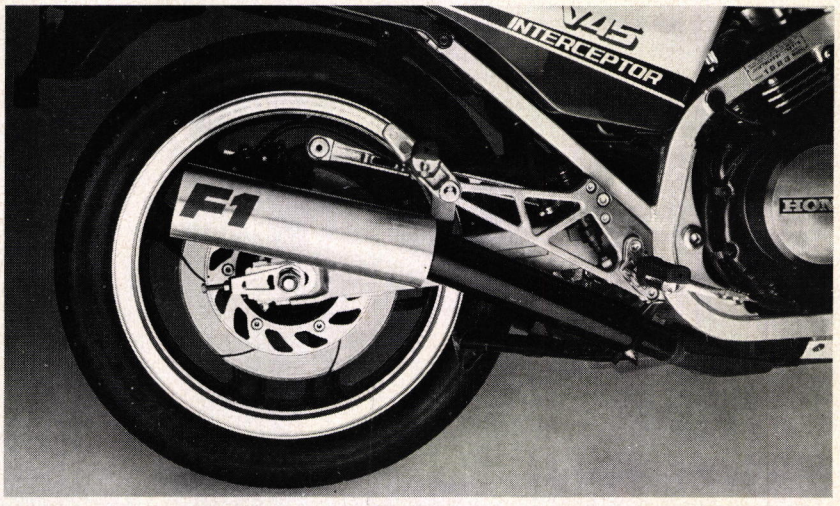

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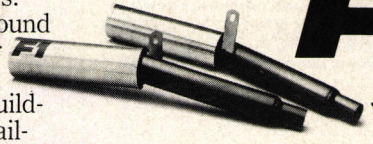

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whereas one year ago the total dollar value for that displacement category imported in January was almost $70 million.

• Honda might have hit on a way to move some of its non-current hardware, while at the same time stimulating sales of new products. Reportedly, Honda is in the final stages of negotiations with U-Haul to sell that rental company a fleet of 1983 ATC200s. The Honda three-wheelers, with trailers, would be added to U-Haul's recreational- and camping-equipment departments at 1100 rental franchises nationwide. Honda is hoping people who otherwise wouldn't get the chance will try a three-wheeler for a weekend or a vacation, and that the trip ends up back in a Honda dealership with the purchase of a new ATC. Joint Honda/U-Haul promotional programs are planned to help this project along.

• Not all is well with the Honda/U-Haul arrangement, however. In fact, the National Motorcycle Retailers Association has announced it will file suit against American Honda Motor Co. Inc. to prevent Honda from going through with its deal with U-Haul. Several Honda dealers have claimed they can't get enough of the ATCs to satisfy present customer demands, and that the agreement with U-Haul will diminish both ATC supplies and sales for the dealers. More on this as it develops.

• BMW has carved another inroad in the U.S. police-bike market. The San Francisco Police Department recently awarded its motorcycle contract to Bavarian Cycle Works, a San Francisco BMW dealership. Although the purchase augmented that city's two-wheeler fleet by only 17 machines, it's the largest police contract for BMW in the United States to date. San Francisco reportedly made its purchase decision based on figures that show the BMW R100 costs only five cents per mile to operate and maintain, while Kawasakis and Harley-Davidsons, the traditional American police force choices, cost 17 cents per mile and 25 cents per mile, respectively.

• While Kawasaki officially is out of roadracing, the company still intends to support the sport. A total of $78,650 has been put in contingency funds for the 1984 racing season. Regional roadrace organizing groups can draw from this fund, with two dragracing sponsors, IDBA and NHRA, included in the pool. Additionally, Kawasaki will pay a 10 percent bonus at selected events in which winning riders or their machines display the Kawasaki logo.

• And that same logo has been flying in Lincoln, Nebraska, for a decade now. This year is Kawasaki's tenth for building motorcycles in the U.S. The 500,000th bike to come off Kawasaki's American assembly line will do so in early May. That machine is expected to be a Ninja, Kawasaki's performance flagship.

RUMORS

• Although Honda is keeping quiet, there's too much talk about street-going two-strokes from that company to dismiss. All the chatter

Book Review

Motorcycle Dictionary/Terminology
by William H. Kosbab
363 pages, $14.95
Career Publishing Inc.
P.O. Box 5486
Orange, California 92667

• There's a new work of mythology for sale in bookstores these days, a collection of original fairytales called "Motorcycle Dictionary/Terminology" by William H. Kosbab. In it, you'll find tales of make-believe more imaginative and far-fetched than any ever conjured by the likes of Mother Goose or Dr. Seuss.

Trouble is, Kosbab's book was not intended as a work of fiction. Rather, it is listed as a reference manual that purports to define all of the words and terms indigenous to motorcycling. But at that ambitious undertaking, the book is a disaster, for it is almost as much a product of Kosbab's vivid imagination as it is a compilation of fact. The result is a 363-page lexicon of fractured facts and moto-malapropisms that, were it a tonque-in-cheek sendup of the real thing, might be humorous. But it's not and it isn't.

There's not room in this review to chronicle all of Kosbab's transgressions, since they number in the hundreds. But you can get an inkling of just how ludicrous many of his definitions are with a few random examples. His explanation of "gear shifter," for instance, says it's "A device that connects a motorcycle engine to a motorcycle gearbox or transmission." Hmmn. The term "coil bind" is defined as "The abnormal condition of coil springs sticking together as they are compressed under high-speed engine operation." And if that doesn't have you scratching your head in wonderment, try "endless chain," which Kosbab says is "Also called an O-ring chain." Indeed.

If these few were its only offenses, "Motorcycle Dictionary/Terminology" still might serve as a passable encyclopedia of the language peculiar to two-wheeling. But how could you trust *any* definition in a book that claims that a cruiser is a touring bike; that an enduro is won by the rider who has traveled the farthest in a set time; that the final-drive gear is usually found in the primary drive unit; or that liquid-cooled motorcycles have fan belts to drive the fan and the water pump. There's also a laughable "CAUTION" posted under the definition of "full throttle" in which Kosbab warns, "Full-throttle operation of an engine at idle can be damaging."

These are examples only of the definitions that are patently wrong. But there are even more that, although not necessarily erroneous, are useless because they're either vaguely worded, oversimplified, filled with half-stated facts or, in many cases, use the word being defined as a pivotal part of the definition. "Belt drive," for instance, is explained as "a drive system that uses a drive belt," just as "bore and stroke" are defined as "the bore measurement and the stroke measurement."

Despite such obvious gaffes, Kosbab actually seems to have some expertise—although it's not necessarily in the field of motorcycling. That would explain his long, involved definitions of terms that are only tangentially connected to the sport. His description of "counter-electromotive force" (when was the last time you heard *that* down at the bike shop?), for example, is 32 lines long, while his explanation of "counterbalance" is just 4 lines. But all too often, his definition is pure gibberish, such as in "hydraulic pressure," which is described as "the force produced by a liquid forced through one or more relatively small openings within a closed system." Ditto for "rake," which Kosbab claims is "The angle of a motorcycle front end...measured between a vertical line from the top of the front end to the ground and the center line running through the front end." Say what?

As if all this weren't enough, Kosbab also attempts to define hundreds of words or phrases that are related to motorcycling only in that someone who rides just *might* utter them in the course of his lifetime. The long list includes such common moto-terminology as "anoint," "wrap," "fission," "askew," "right," "left," "Levi's," "lone wolf" and "call it quits." Jeez, how could any self-respecting motorcyclist get through the day without using those? The point, however, is that the inclusion of definitions that can be found in any dictionary renders a good deal of Kosbab's 363 pages so much wasted space, since no one is going to look up everyday words in a book of motorcycle terminology.

In all fairness, many of Kosbab's definitions *are* correct; the problem is that anyone who needs such a book isn't going to know which ones are right and which ones are wrong. And so there can be only one course of action: Don't buy this masterpiece of misinformation. If you already have, don't read it. And if you've already read it, for God's sake, don't *believe* anything it has told you. Because if you're in the dark now when it comes to understanding motorcycling terms, a trip down fantasy lane with Kosbab will lead you quickly into utter pitch-blackness.

boils down to whether or not Honda will release street-legal versions of its vee-three two-stroke GP bike next year. And our sources swear these bikes will be full-size versions, too, ready to compete heads-up with the often-rumored RD500 streetbike. But if the idea of Honda putting one of its racebikes on the street in near-race-tune sounds a little farfetched, you haven't been paying attention. Where do you think the vee-four Interceptor came from?

• There's no secret, though, about where the RD500 comes from—Yamaha. But there is some question about whether the much-rumored two-stroke will ever make it to U.S. dealerships. Sources at Yamaha confirm that while the half-liter repliracer now is being tested for possible U.S. sale, problems with EPA certification might halt the bike's importation. Reportedly, the technology to get the bike EPA-certified is not the problem. Sources indicate the RD500 project is stalled on the oldest hurdle in the business: money. The cost of the catalytic convertor system (purportedly more than 20 percent of the RD's production cost) required for the bike to meet EPA standards might push this ring-ding out of the price range of the U.S. buyer.

• And while you're thinking about street-going two-strokes for 1985, add this bit of information into the equation. Two years ago, Suzuki made no bones about its interest in releasing a street-legal version of the RG500 racer. The company held back then, reportedly because the market wasn't right for a disc-valved, square-four two-stroke. So how do you think Suzuki regards that bike now? We hear the project is a go, and Suzuki could have that Gamma in its '85 lineup.

• Another four-cylinder engine we've heard about for '85 might come from the recently formed Cagiva/Ducati connection. With Ducati now concentrating exclusively on engine design, it's been rumored that powerplant designer Fabio Taglioni has been busy lately, doing more than just dusting off his drawing board. We've heard he's pulled out plans for a liquid-cooled, vee-four Ducati engine. It's been reported that two versions of this possible vee-four are being considered: one model for touring, and another, higher-output, sportbike version. And the same reports have come in from too many sources to be just idle Italian gossip over cappuccino and cannoli. More on this as it develops.

APART FROM THE CROWD

• To the organizers of the '84 Olympic Torch Relay, the Youth Legacy Kilometer runners are the great unknown. See, the ceremonial torch used to light off this summer's Los Angeles games will be carried 9300 miles across country in an 82-day-long relay. But the torch relay is also a fund-raiser, too, open to any group donating $3000 to a Youth Legacy fund and sponsoring its own runner for a one-kilometer distance. When a check came in from a

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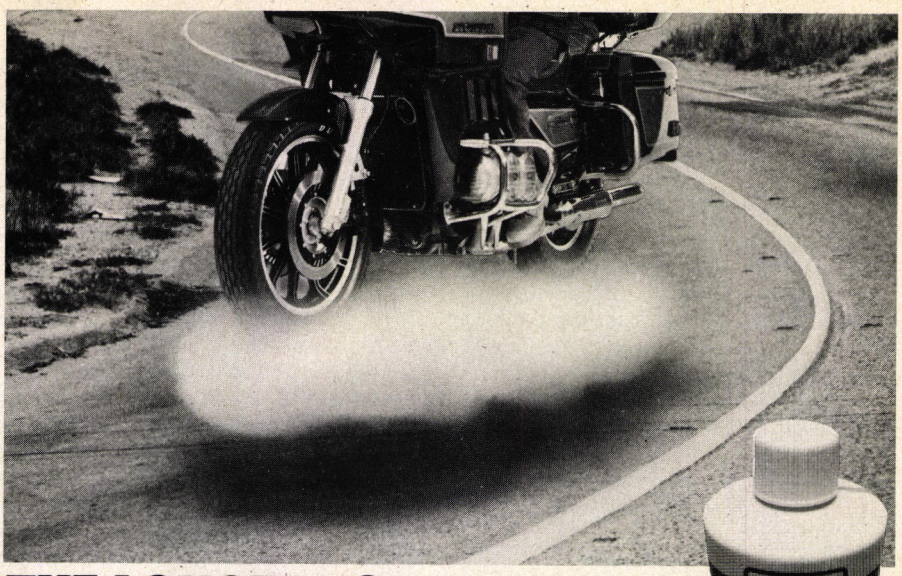

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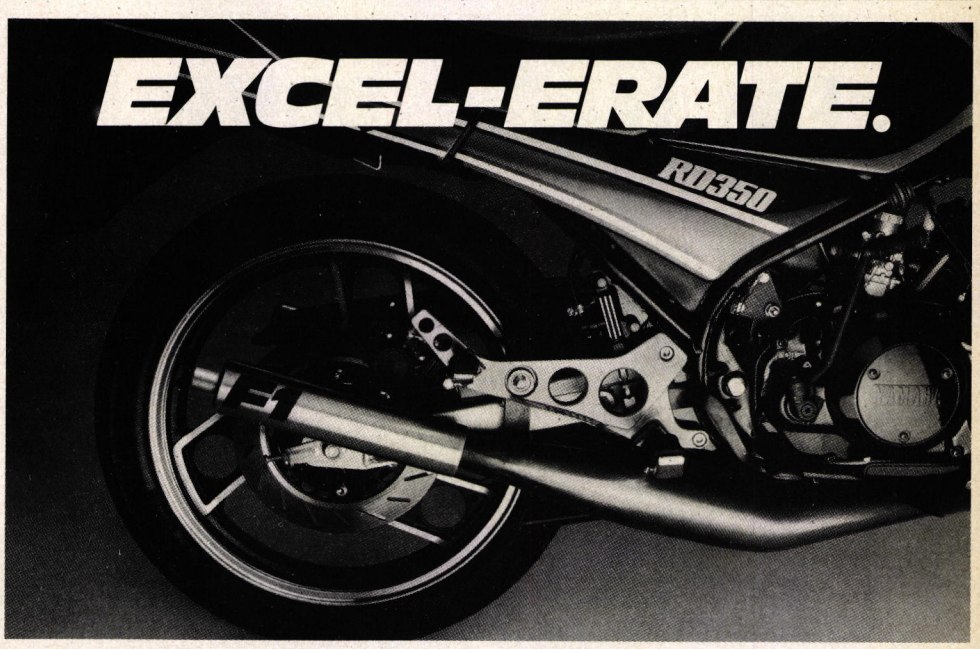

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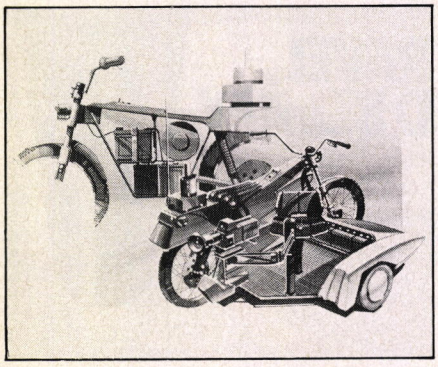
group called HAMCUS, that check was accepted and the HAMCUS-sponsored runner assigned his one kilometer. Then someone found out what HAMCUS was: the Hell's Angels Motorcycle Club of the United States, the national chapter of the notorious bike gang. The Angels were in the relay. The check was good, the money was for charity and the runner was as qualified as any of the others, so the relay committee saw no reason to cancel the entry. And you thought the Hell's Angels never did anything nice. . . .

• That relay committee isn't the only group involved with Olympics that's dealing with the unknown, though. ABC-TV plans to cover certain events with one-off motorcycles, special camera bikes with a 35 mph top speed. But then, they aren't your normal everyday motorcycles. To get that up-close-and-personal story of the Olympic marathon, ABC will use electrically powered bikes, machines built during the '77-'78 gas crisis by Corbin Electric of Somersville, Connecticut.



ABC-TV's fumeless electric camera-bike

Two-wheeled high-tech.

Those vintage battery bikes were just a starting point for the ABC engineering crew, though. A sidecar was added to each bike to carry a cameraman, a microwave transmitter to beam the picture up to a helicopter hovering 10,000 feet overhead, and radar equipment to keep the bike and helicopter traveling in sync. If all that sounds like a handful for a sidecar, it's a piece of cake compared to the setup ABC will use to cover Olympic bicycle roadracing. For those events, the same type of camera, microwave and radar units will come into play, only with the cameraman and his gear parked on the passenger seat of a Suzuki streetbike. That Suzuki won't have an easy time of it, though; it'll be charging up and down the hills of Mission Viejo, California, to keep up with the racing cyclists. And those guys have been known to pedal up a healthy head of steam.

• And speaking of healthy heads, Harley-Davidson popped the top on one at this year's Daytona Cycle Week. The company had Pabst Brewery whip up a special-edition Harley-Davidson beer for the event. All 10,000 cases of the H-D beer sold out before Daytona even started. Scalpers hawked the brew for $5 per can, $25 per six-pack. To put a lid on things,

It's not Bud, but this one's for you

And 30,000 weren't enough.

Harley quickly had Pabst brew up another run of 20,000 additional cases, which also sold out. It gets pretty hot in Florida, you know.

• And if you think you've heard it all, think again. Yes Helmets, a small Italian manufacturer, has introduced a helmet featuring a motor-driven visor that's raised by pushing a button on the side of the helmet. But Yes is not leaving it at that; a revised model is under development. Its visor button will mount on a bike's handlebar, and will activate a radio control mounted on the helmet to raise and lower the visor. Now you've heard it all. •

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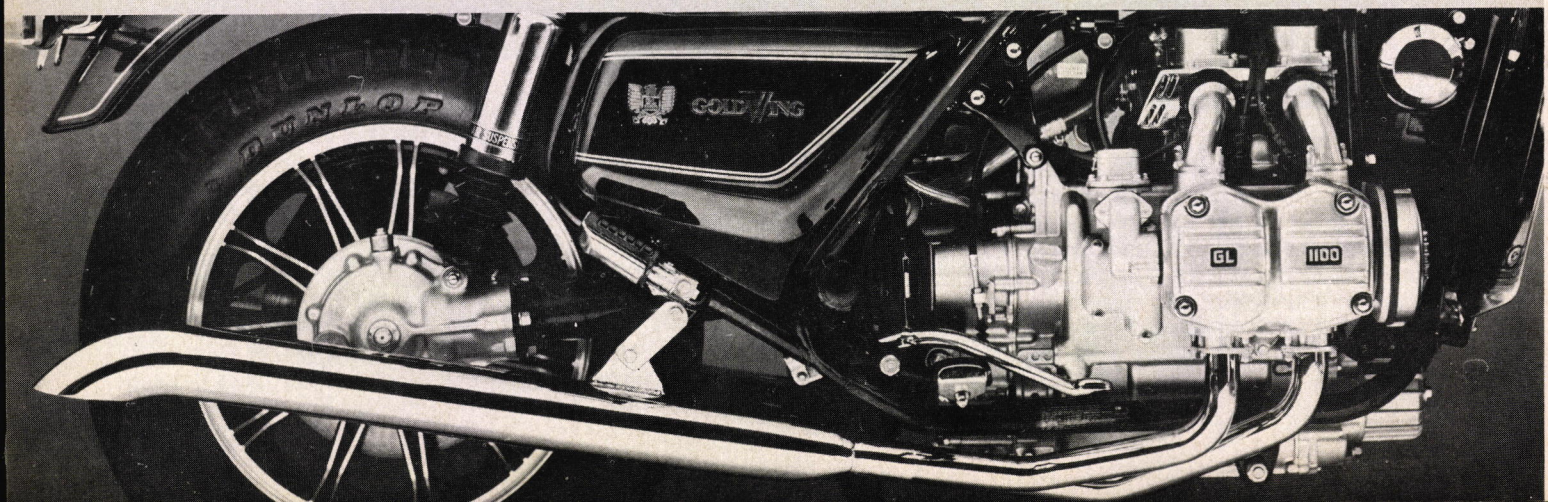

RIDING IMPRESSION:

Yamaha TZ250L

"One world-championship-winning motorcycle, please, to go."

BY DAIN GINGERELLI

Yamaha offers something that no other motorcycle manufacturer in the world can. If you've got the money and the proper credentials, you can walk into an authorized Yamaha dealer and buy a world-championship-winning motorcycle. You see, the TZ250L, the 1984 version of the quarter-liter pocket-rocket that Yamaha has sold over the counter for nearly two decades, is based on the same TZ250 that Venezuelan Carlos Lavado used to win the 250cc Grand Prix World Championship.

There is a catch, however: Yamaha Motor Corp. U.S.A. is not importing many of the new L-models. In fact, the bike we track-tested at Willow Springs last February was the only one in the country at the time. The same bike, along with owner/rider Tracy DeMuro and tuner John Lassak, later went to Daytona for the International Lightweight 100 race (a race, incidently, won by Wayne Rainey, who rode a similar TZ250L supplied to him by Yamaha, via Kenny Roberts' efforts).

Our test bike, with exception of a paint scheme to advertise DeMuro's two major sponsors—Hang Two and A-1 Cycle Specialties—was stock. In fact, DeMuro had just completed a routine break-in session before handing it over for our test. Even the WM4 (front) and WM5 (rear) wire-laced rims had yet to be replaced with EPM magnesium wheels, which would reduce the bike's dry weight by about nine pounds: On the official AMA scales, DeMuro's EPM-equipped TZ weighed 225 pounds, nine pounds less than stock.

Even with the wire wheels, though, Yamaha claims the TZ250L is about five pounds lighter than last year's K-model. And the L is vastly improved over the K in other ways, too. The frame has been strengthened and the fork has 40mm-diameter stanchion tubes instead of the K's 35mm tubes. Plus, the Power Jet Mikuni carbs' venturis are two millimeters larger—38mm versus 36mm—and the ignition timing was bumped from 1.2mm before top dead center to 1.8mm. But perhaps the most notable improvement is the use of electromechanical power valves, which replace the mechanical setup used since 1981, when the power-valve system was introduced on the TZ250H.

Daingerous Dain in the saddle

DeMuro and Lassak give the briefing.

As a result of those engine changes, the L's powerband is broader than that of any previous stock TZ250. But "broad" is a relative term: As with all other TZ250s, most of the power lies above 10,000 rpm. And at that engine speed, the motor, although muffled by the water jackets, begins to howl and scream, and the bike's acceleration firmly plants you into the fiberglass seat, with only a thin pad of foam to isolate the vibration from your butt. When the engine peaks out at 12,500 rpm, the vibration peaks, too, and your hands tingle while you hold onto the narrow, diamond-pattern handgrips.

The vibration, which DeMuro says he never notices in a race, just makes the little Yamaha that much more demanding to ride. The bike steers quickly (Yamaha reduced the steering head angle to help increase front tire traction), and you had better know exactly where you want to point the TZ, or else you'll find yourself wandering all over the racetrack. Even Kenny Roberts claims the tiddler Yamahas are quick to turn; racing a TZ250 is as much an excercise in concentration as it is in coordination.

Even so, riding the TZ250 is rather easy.

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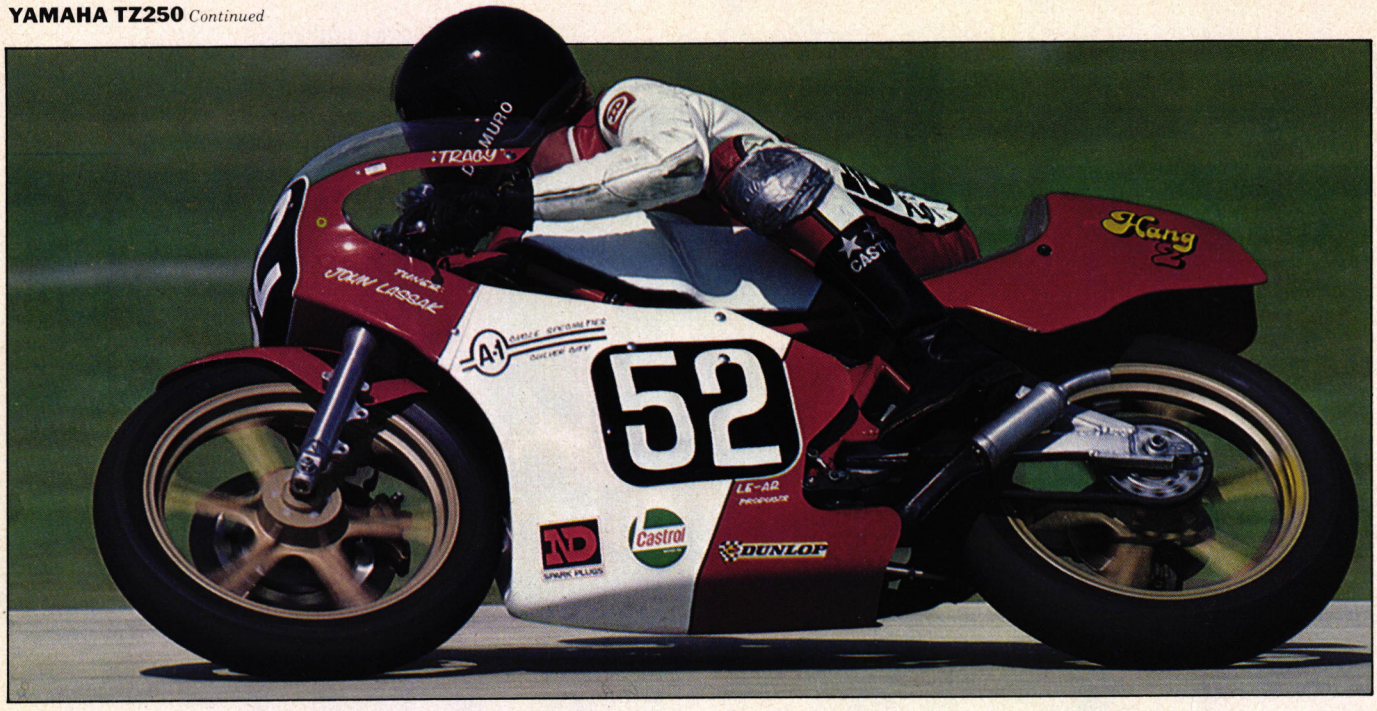
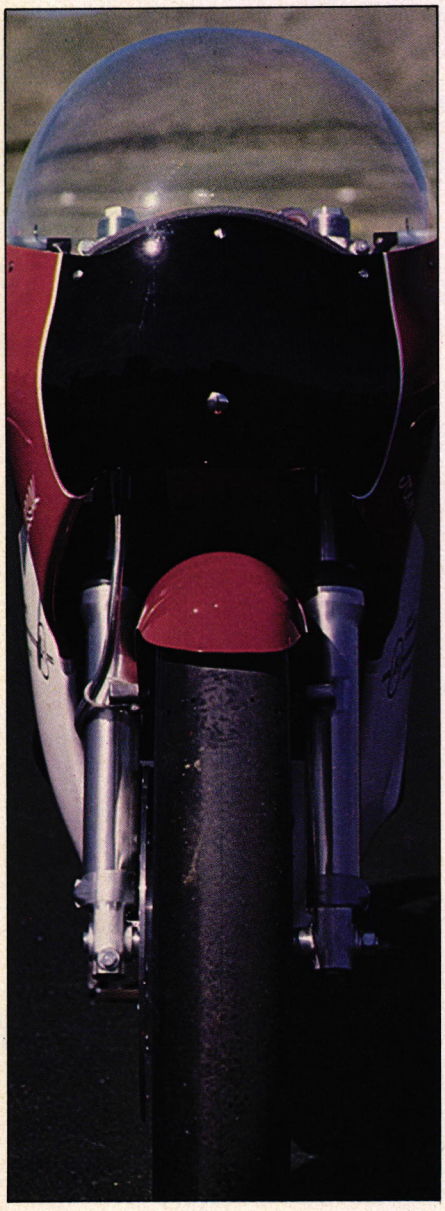
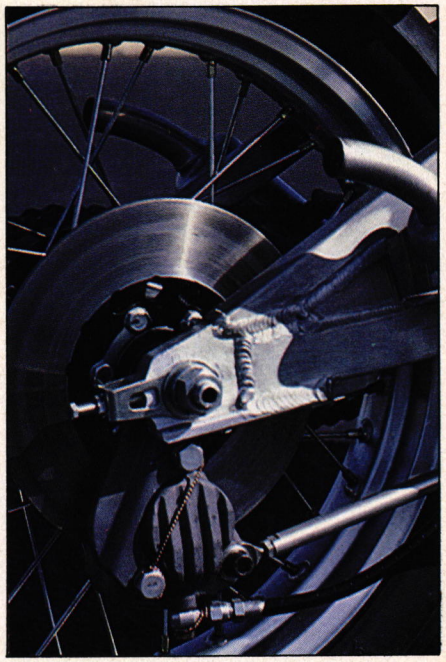




Riding it at racing speeds is the tough part, though. Not only is it necessary to master the quick steering, but you have to pay strict attention to engine speed, too, and never let the revs fall below 9500, where the engine is noticeably anemic. If you lose rpm with this little racer, you've also lost any chance of posting a respectable lap time. And quick lap times, as well as winning, are the underlying purpose for a racebike such as the 250L.

But the toughest part about riding the TZ250L at racing speeds is slowing it down. The 11.7-inch-diameter disc front brake works well, but the quick steering makes a last-second dive into a turn thrilling, if not scary, because the Yamaha twitches from side to side when the bike's weight transfers forward during hard braking. And with most of your weight forcing down on the clip-on handlebars, you feel as though the TZ wants to spit you over the fairing when you clamp on the brakes.

Obviously, racing the TZ250L is no simple matter. Putting it all together—steering, braking and maintaining engine rpm—requires the delicate touch of a brain surgeon. And while the Yamaha is one of the best bikes of its kind in the world, a racer has to know how to do all of those things at 100 percent of his riding ability to win. Because winning races is why people like DeMuro buy Yamaha TZ250s—and why Yamaha sells them. ●



Not all the technology went into making the TZ250 fast

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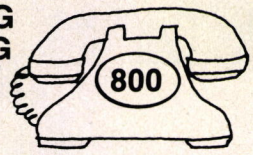

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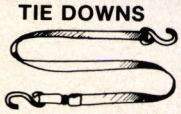

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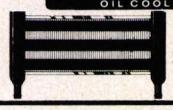

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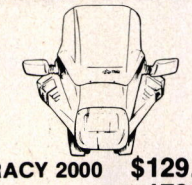

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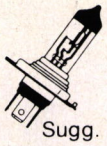

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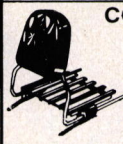

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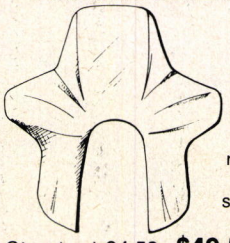

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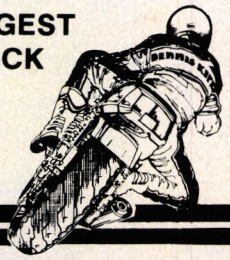

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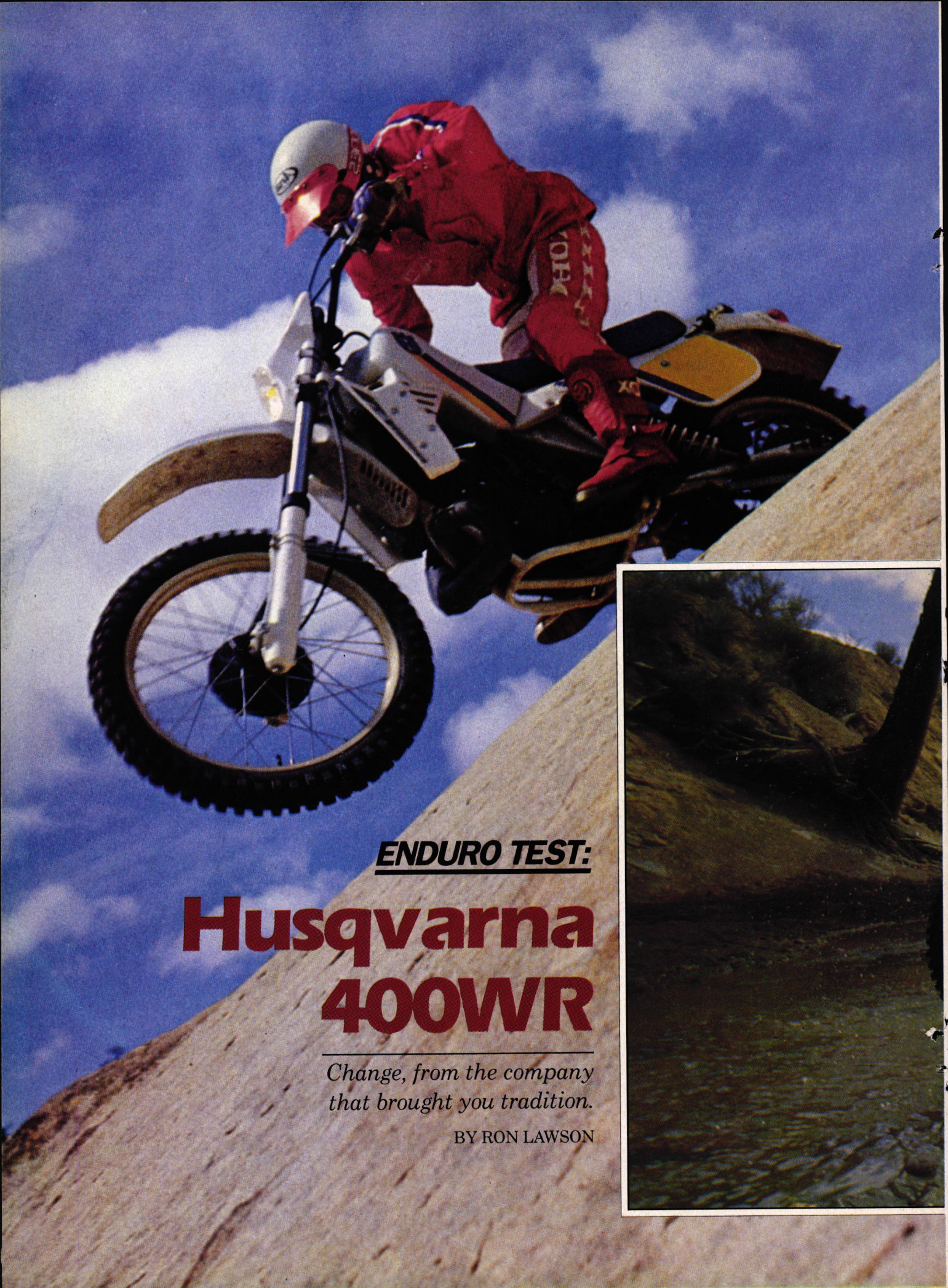


ENDURO TEST:

Husqvarna 400WR

Change, from the company that brought you tradition.

BY RON LAWSON

No one ever accused Husqvarna of being fickle. When it comes to accepting new ideas, the Swedish firm moves with all the rash, impulsive speed of a glacier. Husqvarna's corporate manifesto stresses success through conservatism, and 14 national enduro titles attest to the effectiveness of that philosophy.

That's why the mid-1984 release of the 400WR caught Husky devotees by surprise. This is one Husqvarna that initiates, rather than resists, change. The 400 is the first liquid-cooled, Open-class dirtbike offered in this country; currently Cagiva makes the only other liquid-cooled enduro bike of *any* size. But even more significant is the WR's displacement. In an age where the trend is toward larger and larger Open-class powerhouses, the new 400 sets a precedent by being *smaller* than its two most recent precursors, the 1983 430WR and the 1984 500WR.

Husqvarna is attempting to anticipate trends, rather than following them, and now is jumping on the small-bore bandwagon before it even starts moving. That wagon undoubtedly will gain momentum, though, because the 400WR makes a convincing case that the wave of the future will, indeed, be smaller-displacement Open bikes. The WR is anything but short on horsepower, and in fact, its low-end torque will put Husqvarna's own 500XC to shame. The WR has the kind of power that helps compensate for the rider's mistakes. On steep, slow uphills, you can be in the wrong gear, on the wrong line, you can do almost everything wrong, and the WR will pretend it doesn't notice and keep chugging right up the hill. As long as the throttle is just slightly open, the bike is downright unstoppable, even at idle-level rpm.

That low-rpm torque combines with the Husky's propensity to rev right into the stratosphere to make an extremely easy-to-use enduro powerplant. In outright acceleration, the WR probably won't break any records, but the Husky will hold its own against a Yamaha IT490, and will run away and hide from both Honda's Open-class enduro entries, the XR350R and the XR500R.

Husqvarna dug this bottomless well of power with the same tools used on the 430WR and 500WR: four transfer ports, one booster transfer and an unbridged exhaust port. Unlike previous Huskys, though, the WR has a center-port exhaust, and the reed valve is a single eight-petal unit rather than the dual-vertical-block type used on the 430. The stroke is the same as the 430's, at 74mm, although the bore was decreased 3.5mm to 82.5mm. Husqvarna claims that for deep woods applications, where brute strength isn't the most vital consideration, the new bore-and-stroke configuration strikes the right balance between power and manageability. Many other parts of the 400 can be traced back to earlier Huskys. The clutch is similar to the 430's, but has two additional plates, and, while the ratios of the six-speed transmission are unchanged from the '83 WR's, the primary ratio is lower and the final ratio is taller. Husqvarna's main goal wasn't to alter overall gearing, which is only fractionally lower than the 430's. The primary purpose was to increase the size of

Continued

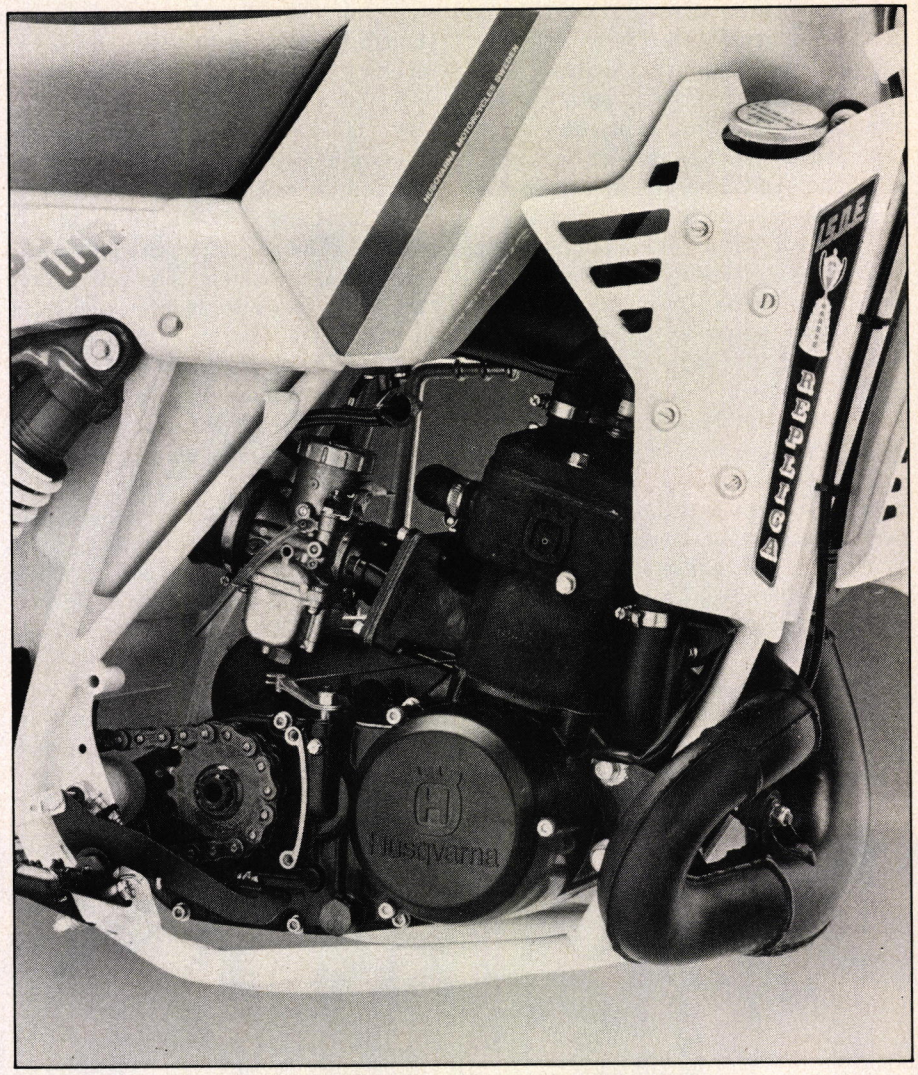
PHOTOGRAPHY © 1984 DAVID BUSH

the drive sprocket, thereby reducing the chain wear caused by the sharp bend around a small sprocket.

A more obvious difference between the 400 and any of its predecessors is, of course, that the new WR is liquid-cooled. Unlike Husqvarna's 250 motocrosser, which has one radiator located behind the downtube, the 400 has two small Nippon-Denso radiators, one on each side of the downtube, leaving more space for the 400's bulkier cylinder and head. Husqvarna offers the same reasoning for the switch to liquid-cooling that other manufacturers gave: More efficient cooling prevents power loss during long rides; increases longevity of the engine; and allows higher compression and closer piston-to-cylinder tolerances. Additionally, a bike with a liquid-cooled motor actually can weigh less than the air-cooled variety. The first two of these explanations are difficult to substantiate; during our test of the air-cooled 430WR last year, we never experienced power loss or engine failure due to overheating. And with a liquid-cooled bike, it is possible for a stick or twig to puncture one of the radiators, as Kevin Hines discovered during the 1984 Alligator Enduro. The remaining rationales are irrefutable. The 400 does have tighter clearances and a higher compression ratio than did the 430, and at 242 pounds, the machine is a few pounds lighter than any Open-class Husqvarna enduro bike in recent memory.

Those few pounds don't tell the whole story, either. The new 400 doesn't just feel light for a Husky, it feels light by any trail-bike standards—and that's out of character for a Euro-enduro machine. The WR's light feel, more than any other asset, is what sets the 400 apart from earlier Huskys, and will convert more nonHusky riders into full-blown Swedefreaks. Husqvarna finally budged from the super-slow steering geometry that was the company's trademark for years. Compared to the '83 430, the rake is steeper, there's less trail, and the wheelbase is shorter. But even though those dimensions mark a big change for Husqvarna, the WR still has more rake and trail than any other bike in its class.

Even with the old conservative measurements, past Huskys have been well-suited for weaving through the trees lining a tight, winding trail. Huskys simply required the rider to adopt a style that consisted more of steering the bike with the rear wheel—by braking and sliding—than by pointing the front wheel. The old technique still works, but now the WR steers in the more-conventional fashion too. The bike has a flick-it-through-the-trees feel that is more in tune with a 250 enduro bike than with a big-bore. In fact, the only other Open bike that can match the Husky for agility is a Honda XR350R.



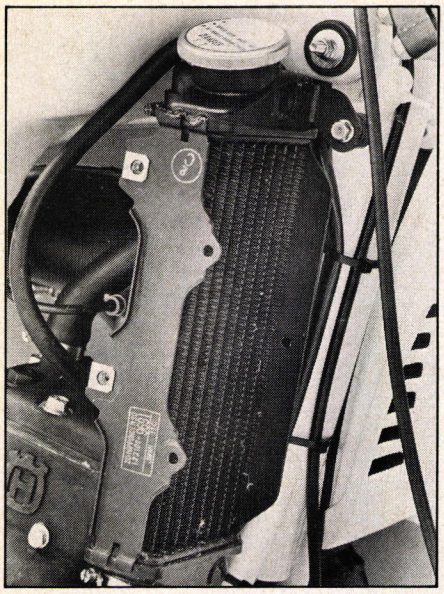
DETAIL PHOTOGRAPHY © 1984 VIC HUBER

Husqvarna's 400WR fights conventional enduro philosophy on two fronts

The new weapons are claims that smaller is better and liquid is cooler.

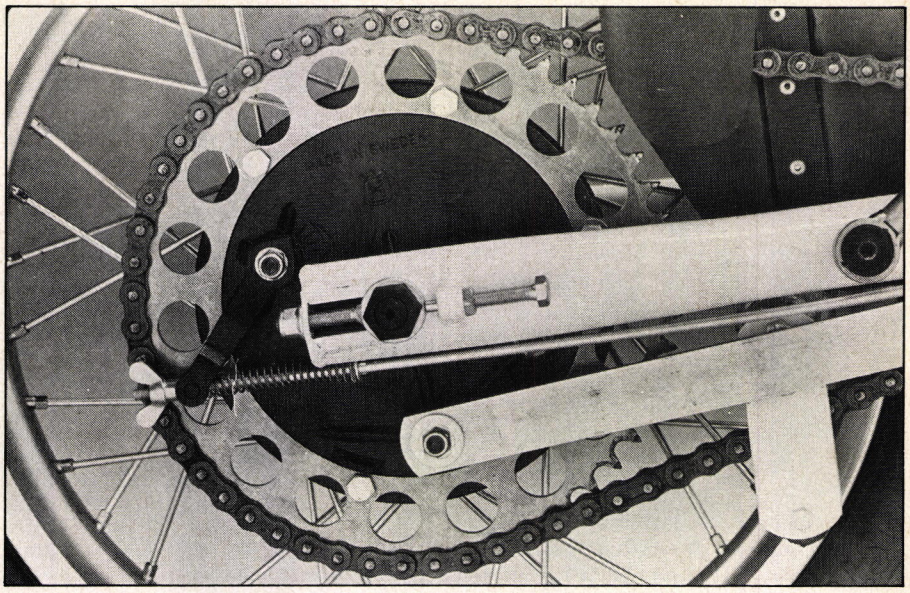
When you run out of trees and there's nothing ahead but high-speed terrain, though, that Honda isn't in the same league with the WR. Even the most hardened Husky fanatic won't mourn the passing of the old rake and trail dimensions, because Husqvarna has gotten away with an impressive feat: There's virtually no trade-off for the increase in agility. The 400 is as stable as any Husky of the past. And that means the bike is *very* stable, without even a hint of head-shaking or wandering off-course. That's especially true in high-speed sand washes. No bike is easier to handle when the going gets deep and loose. The WR just plows ahead, ignoring the sand's constant attempts at redirection.

Rocks and whoops have even less chance of throwing the WR off course, in sand or on a trail. Both the front and rear are at their best in slow, tight situations, and the WR handles sharp rocks and tree roots as effectively as any bike made. In rougher, more wide-open territory, though, the Husky's flawless demeanor begins to erode, and the suspension suddenly seems too soft. The rear, in particular, occasionally bottoms and gives the rider a substantial jolt. The WR uses a twin-shock system with Husqvarna's Immediate Track Control (ITC) Ohlins shocks. ITC is Husqvarna's reply to single-shock, rising-rate suspension. An internal valve in each of the Ohlins shocks progressively increases damping as the shock is compressed. So in addition to having speed-sensitive damping—like other hydraulic shocks—the Ohlins also are position-sensitive. This provides a rising-rate system previously only possible by using a mechanical-linkage system like that on most single-shock dirt bikes.



One of the WR's two Nippon Denso radiators

A U.S./Japan trade route via Sweden.



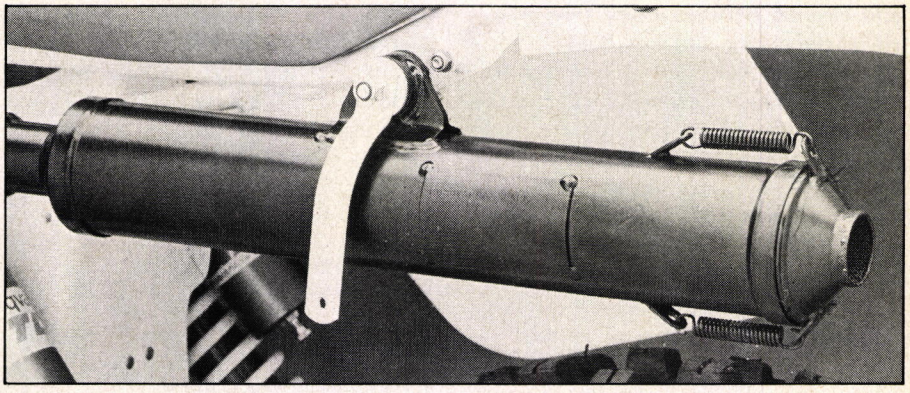
New Husqvarna rear brake has a redesigned labyrinth seal for better waterproofing

Stopping power is poor, wet or dry.

Like the rear end, the fork performs well in the tight stuff, but isn't free of minor shortcomings. Under hard braking, the front end will dive like Jacques Cousteau tied to an anvil. And so much seal friction is present that the Husqvarna-made fork doesn't even react to small bumps. Harsh bottoming is rare, though, and the WR's front end excels in medium to rough terrain.

Actually, the WR excels in almost every performance-related category. A long, successful enduro heritage stands behind this Husky, and it shows. But despite all those championships, the WR does have weaknesses. Nothing that can cost a win, mind you, just details that Husqvarna shuffled back on the priority list while the engine and chassis were being honed to near perfection.

The biggest of the 400's little flaws is its lack of stopping power. The WR will stop, but the task requires considerable effort. The rear brake demands far too much pedal pressure before it brings the machine to a halt. Long-time Husky riders grow accustomed to this and claim that powerful brakes and controllable brakes are mutually exclusive. But other bikes stop more quickly, more controllably and with less effort, so this argument can be filed along with British claims that oil puddles are a sign of character.



Forestry-approved spark arrestor is standard gear on the Husky 400WR

But it's too loud, too restrictive, too easily clogged and too hard to clean.

Husqvarna hasn't ignored the 400's brakes, though. This year, both brakes have a new labyrinth seal between the backing plate and hub for better waterproofing. And of course, owners invariably find little tricks to make the bike stop quicker. We filed down the high points on the shoes so they made better contact with the drum, and we also lengthened the rear brake actuating arm by 3/8-inch. This helped, but still the rear brake was only mediocre. The front

Continued

COMPARATIVE TEST DATA:

Make and Model	Wheel Travel, Front/Rear, in.	Weight (fuel tank empty), lb.	Weight Bias, Front/Rear, percent	Steering Head Angle/Trail, degrees/inches	Transmission, number of speeds
Husqvarna 400WR-'84	11.0/11.2	242	47.1/52.9	28.5/5.16	6
Husqvarna 430WR-'83	10.4/10.6	246	47.0/53.0	30.0/5.98	6
Honda XR350R-'83	10.9/10.4	253	47.3/52.7	26.0/3.94	6
Honda XR500R-'83	11.0/12.2	278	47.0/53.0	25.5/3.94	5
Maico 490E-'83	11.9/12.6	261	46.4/53.6	27.7/4.60	5
Yamaha TT600-'83	11.7/10.8	280	45.0/55.0	28.0/4.65	5

brake is stronger, but is a double-leading-shoe unit, and consequently won't stop the bike from rolling backward on a hill.

Another longtime sore point for Husqvarna is its tire selection. The Trelleborgs work well in sand and mud, but offer little grip on hard-packed ground. A few years ago this kind of compromise was common, but as with the WR's brakes, this is no longer acceptable; other OEM tires today stand up to virtually every type of terrain from the deserts to the forests.

And if you do much forest riding, you'll discover yet another Husky shortcoming. While the WR does have a spark arrestor approved by the U.S. Forest Service, the machine is too loud to pass the 104-decibel limit imposed at enduros run on national forest land. And the WR's spark arrestor is the same easily clogged screen that Husky riders have complained about for years. Unless the screen is removed and cleaned between every ride, it will choke the engine and cost power.

Other complaints are minor, but still noticeable, like the excessive width of the machine, caused in part by the twin shocks, and in part by the pipe. But there are well-thought-out details, too, that cancel some of the gripes. The machine comes stock with a Swedish SEM ignition that has two 70-watt lighting leads, so the rider can hook up almost anything that suits his fancy, from an extra set of lights to a home stereo system. And Husqvarna still offers a 30-day warranty on the engine and frame.

Overall, though, the credit side of the detail ledger is heavily overpowered by the nagging problems and inconveniences of the 400WR. This Husky makes it seem like the price of having a bike with all the big things right—things like power and handling—is having a bike with all the small things wrong.

Still, though, the big things are right—that much is immediately obvious from a ride on the WR. The machine's incredible powerband and faultless trail manners make the WR the best enduro bike to win with, and that's why the Open class in most enduros looks like a Husky parade. But don't get the idea that the Husqvarna 400WR is the world's best Open enduro bike because it's perfect. It's the best because there's nothing better. •

Nits:

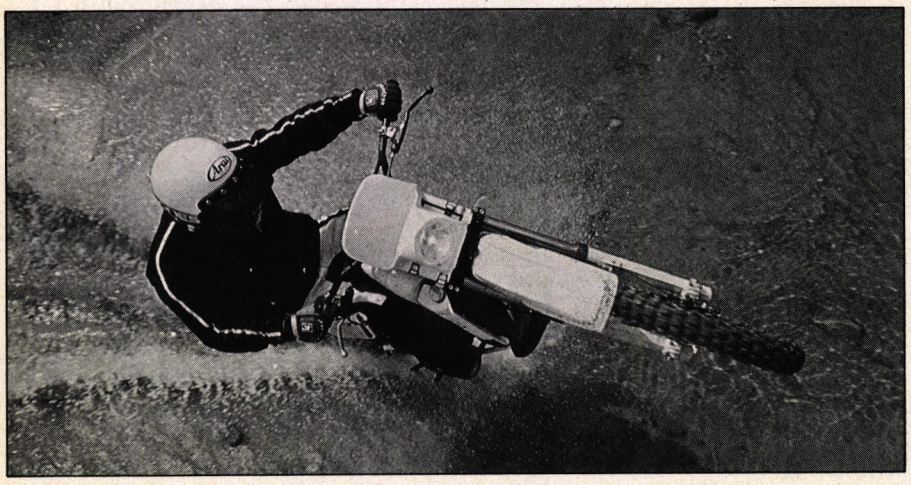
- Speedometer is inaccurate and odometer is difficult to reset.
- Kickstand is flimsy.
- Clutch lever is hard to reach.
- Kill button shorts out easily.
- No quick-disconnect wheels.

Picks:

- Airbox is watertight.
- Tank carries fuel below frame backbone for lower center of gravity.
- Short fork overhang below front axle prevents fork from hanging up in ruts.
- Cables have provisions for lubrication.

400WR Replacement Parts

Piston Kit (includes piston, ring, pin and circlips)	94.40
Ring	16.16
Cylinder	345.16
Gasket Kit	12.80
Main Jet	2.94
Clutch Drive Plate (8 required)	7.86
Clutch Driven Plate (7 required)	5.52
Rear Sprocket	42.14
Front Sprocket	15.90
Air Filter Element	19.52
Front Brake Shoe (2 required)	9.38
Rear Brake Shoe (2 required)	9.38
Clutch Cable	11.39
Brake Cable	11.39
Throttle Cable	11.39
Clutch Lever	21.26
Front Brake Lever	15.80
Rear Brake Pedal	19.00
Shift Lever	33.96



A long string of national titles has shown Husqvarna the art of enduro survival

And the 400WR reflects that heritage, come fire, water or special tests.

Ride Review

• To avoid any confusion, I'll come right out and say that Husqvarna's 400WR is, without doubt, the best enduro bike money can buy. But this fantastic Husky, like others we've tested, has some problems. When I've criticized those areas before, some of you got the impression I don't like Huskys—and I don't want you to think that about the 400WR, because nothing could possibly be any further from the truth.

I love this bike for its perfect combination of the light feel of a 250 and the stump-pulling midrange of a 500. In fact, there are plenty of situations where you get in trouble and are waiting for the motor to die like a 250's. Instead, the 400WR's just keeps on chugging, hauling you back to safety.

The chassis, too, works well enough to make high speed averages easy. Fast or slow, the WR goes where you point it, with only the brakes and the stock Trelleborg tires as limiting factors. As on every Husky in recent memory, the 400WR's brakes are powerless, don't provide any feel, and demand control inputs on the order of those made by the Incredible Hulk to make them work. But don't get me wrong, I still love the bike. It's just that it isn't quite perfect.

—David Dewhurst

• The strangest feeling comes over me every time I ride the Husqvarna 400WR. It's the same kind of admiration I'd feel straddling Kenny Roberts' GP bike, or handling Johnny O'Mara's factory motocrosser. See, the 400WR is not just some souped-up playbike, nor is it a detuned motocrosser with lights and a spark arrestor bolted on. No way, pal; the WR is a from-the-ground-up enduro racing machine, and it's clear that Husqvarna spent most of the bike's development time in the dirt rather than laboring over a drawing board. And so it comes as no surprise that the "works" Huskys are really lightly modified production units, not big-dollar factory one-offs. That's something very few championship-caliber machines can claim.

Not only does this show well for Husqvarna, but it greatly benefits the sub-Melton-level enduro racer, as well. For example, liquid-cooling the 400 turns out to be more than just a sales feature, since it exacts no weight or handling penalties, and will surely benefit piston/ring longevity—especially for those of us who race summertime desert enduros. Regardless of how trick the 400WR might appear, it's destined to do its toughest battles on the racecourse, not the showroom floor. *—Marc Cook*

CYCLE GUIDE SPECIFICATIONS

Husqvarna 400WR — enduro

IMPORTER: Husqvarna Motor Corp., 4935 Mercury St., San Diego, California 92111

SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE: $3195

ENGINE

Type . . . . . liquid-cooled two-stroke vertical single
Port arrangement . . . . . one reed-valve-controlled intake, four main transfers, one booster transfer, one exhaust
Bore and stroke . . . . . 82.5mm x 74.0mm
Displacement 395.6cc
Compression ratio (uncorrected) 12.5:1
Carburetion . . . . . one 38mm Mikuni slide/needle
Air filter . . . . . dual-stage washable oiled foam element
Lubrication . . . . . pre-mixed fuel and oil
Starting system . . . . . primary kick
Ignition . . . . . flywheel-magneto CDI
Charging system . . . . . none; direct AC lighting

DRIVETRAIN

Primary drive . . . . . straight-cut gears; 2.303:1 ratio
Clutch . . . . . wet, multi-plate
Final drive . . . . . #520 chain (⅝-in. pitch, ¼-in. width); 3.467:1 (52/15) ratio

Gear	Internal gear ratio	Overall gear ratio	MPH per 1000 RPM
I	2.615	20.881	3.65
II	1.813	14.471	5.27
III	1.368	10.925	6.98
IV	1.043	8.331	9.16
V	0.880	7.026	10.86
VI	0.741	5.914	12.90

SUSPENSION/WHEEL TRAVEL

Front . . . . . Husqvarna air-spring, 40mm stanchion tube diameter/11.0 in. (280mm)
Rear . . . . . dual Ohlins shocks, 10-position adjustable spring preload/11.2 in. (284mm)

BRAKES

Front . . . . . drum, double-leading shoe
Rear . . . . . drum, single-leading shoe, rod-operated

TIRES

Front . . . . . 3.00-21 Trelleborg Deep Grip T544 Motocross
Rear . . . . . 5.00-18 Trelleborg Ten-Masters Motocross 744

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

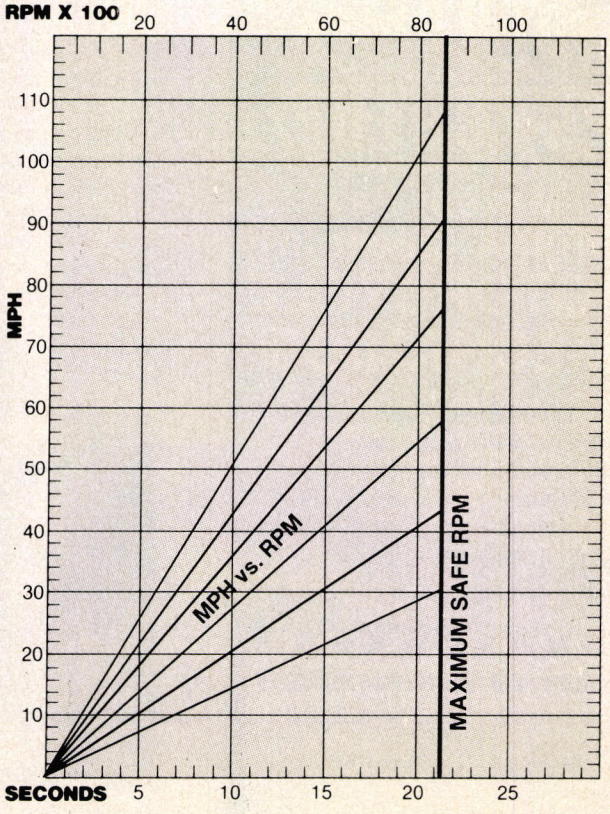
Weight . . . . . 242 lbs. (109.8kg)
Weight distribution . . . . . 47.1% front, 52.9% rear
Wheelbase . . . . . 56.7 to 57.8 in. (1441 to 1467mm)
Seat height . . . . . 36.9 in. (938mm)
Handlebar width . . . . . 32.7 in. (830mm)
Footpeg height . . . . . 16.1 in. (409mm)
Ground clearance . . . . . 8.9 in. (226mm), at skidrail
Steering head angle . . . . . 28.5 degrees from vertical
Front wheel trail . . . . . 5.16 in. (131mm)
Frame . . . . . tubular chromoly steel, single front downtube
Fuel tank . . . . . plastic, 2.8 gal. (10.5/), no reserve
Instrumentation . . . . . speedometer, odometer, tripmeter resettable in tenths

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (observed) . . . . . 93 mph (150 km/h)

WARRANTY: 30 days on engine and frame only

AVAILABLE COLOR: white only



All weight and measurements are taken with machine unladen and fuel tank empty.

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PRODUCT EVALUATION:

RZ350 Seat Cowl

For those who go it alone.

• Some motorcyclists think the ideal sportbike should be as much like a racebike as possible, unencumbered by any excess baggage—such as passengers. For RZ350 owners with such singular desires, Yamaha offers its Seat Cowl, a bolt-on plastic shell that converts the stock saddle into a solo seat, with more or less the racy appearance of a GP bike's throne.

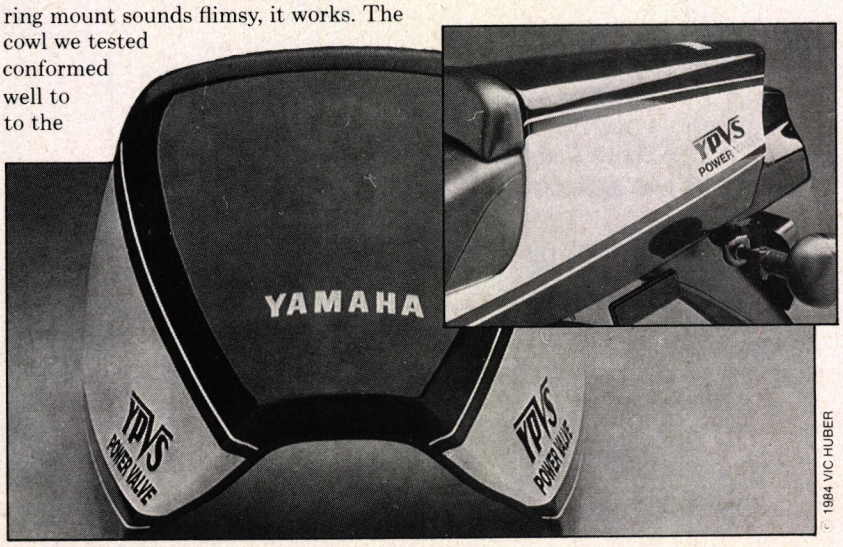
That change isn't permanent, however, since the cowl ($144.95 from Yamaha dealers) fits over the stock saddle. Installation requires removing the standard tailpiece and grabrail, which unbolt from the frame. The cowl's forward mount consists of two metal brackets that bolt to the seat base with Torx-head screws—something few home toolkits are equipped to handle. The screws are easily replaced, but the cowl's mounting system requires that you pierce the seatcover to reach the tapped holes in the RZ's seat base. No provision is made to prevent the edges of the holes from tearing after the cowl is installed, and nothing is provided to cover the holes when the cowl is removed.

In the rear, the cowl mounts with a pair of rubber O-rings that loop over the turnsignal stalks onto hooks molded into the inside of the plastic cowl. Installing the O-rings requires removing the turnsignals, but the complete cowl installation takes less than 20 minutes, once you screw up the courage to poke holes in the seatcover. And even if the O-ring mount sounds flimsy, it works. The cowl we tested conformed well to to the shape of the seat and fit tightly over the taillight at the rear. The only possible complaint with the fit is that the cowl is somewhat wider than the seat itself, and stands out about ¼-inch from the seat lock. But there are no complaints with the finish; the quality of the paint (color-matched to either the red-and-white or yellow-and-black RZ paint schemes) is good, and the alignment of the graphics on the bike and cowl is spot-on.

Once installed, the cowl allows the rider to brace himself when tucked in, but doesn't interfere with rider movement. The cowl's padded plug does transmit some minor vibration, however. Unsnapping the plug provides access to a small storage area, and removing the entire seat/cowl combination allows access to the bike's underseat storage space and toolkit. You'll need that storage space, too, because the cowl's slick surface precludes strapping anything behind you.

But the rider who installs a Seat Cowl on his RZ likely is far more concerned with sportbiking—and sport-profiling—than with what he can carry behind him. And as a sporty styling device, the Seat Cowl works. Its addition transforms the RZ from something that might be seen in the parking lot of a racetrack to something that looks like it might be more at home on pit row. After all, when was the last time you saw Roberts carrying a passenger?

—Jim Miller



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Yamaha's Seat Cowl slips over the stock RZ350 saddle

And brings the look of the RZ that much closer to the track.

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PRODUCT EVALUATION:

Qwik Products Gauge Mounted Pump

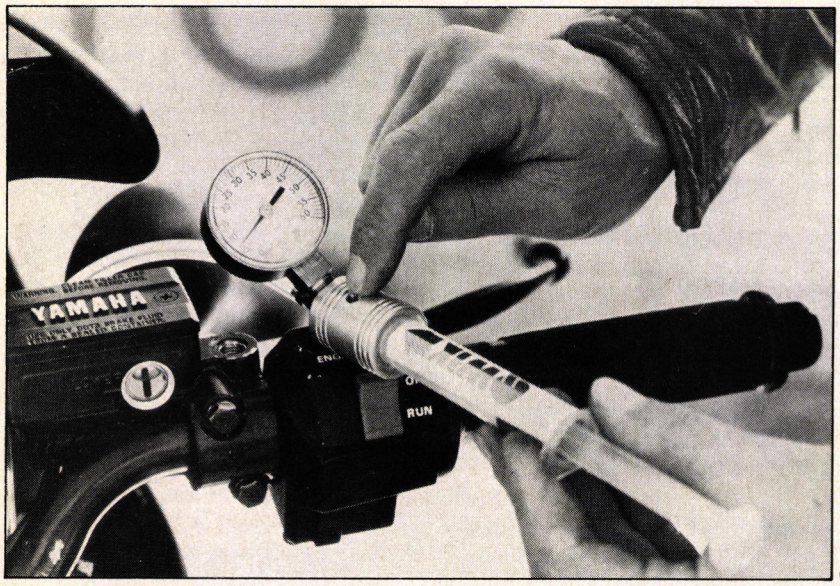
Putting the pressure on high-tech suspensions.

• Air-assist suspensions are a tremendous benefit, but they can be a mixed blessing. True, they allow rapid adjustment to varying riding conditions and load, but save for a few full-dress tourers with on-board compressors, you're on your own to make those air-pressure suspension changes. And as anyone who's ever used standard tire pumps and gauges to adjust air-assist suspensions can tell you, using separate adjustment tools can be frustrating—and inaccurate—with the low volumes air shocks and forks require.

Qwik Products addressed this problem in designing its Gauge Mounted Pump, which combines a plunger-type air pump and an air-pressure gauge into one neat package. Qwik Products sells the pump with gauges calibrated for maximum readings of 15, 30, 60 or 100 psi. In addition, two pump sizes are available: either high-pressure, low-volume—best for adjusting suspension components—or low-pressure, high-volume. With either pump size, the body connects to an aluminum valve boss that supports an air gauge and a recessed, thumb-operated Schrader valve for bleeding air. An eight-inch plastic hose connects the pump's threaded chuck to the valve body.

Once that chuck is threaded onto the valve for your motorcycle's air-assist suspension, you'll find that the Gauge Mounted Pump is the simplest, most consistent tool available for making suspension changes. The pump's O-ring-sealed chuck makes the task easy, because once the suspension is adjusted to the desired pressure, the line can be removed with virtually no pressure loss. This feature is even more useful on bikes without interconnected air forks.

For suspension setup, either in a garage or at the side of the road, the QP gauge/pump is unbeatable. The device allows easy, precise adjustment and return to previously used settings, and the unit's small size makes it a natural for carry-along use. For some, the pump's $36.95 retail price ($39.95 with both pump bodies) might seem exorbitant, but it's a bargain considering the tool's utility. From now on, at least one Qwik pump will be part of the standard equipment on all of our testing sessions. If you want to make the most of your motorcycle's air suspension, the Qwik Gauge Mounted Pump is the best deal going. It's available from motorcycle accessory dealers or from Qwik Products, 1941 East Edinger Avenue, Dept. CG, Santa Ana, California 92705. — *Marc Cook*



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Tester puts a finger on Gauge Mounted Pump's air bleed

Nailing down accurate suspension adjustment.

Some thoughts on motorcycle lubrication from Robert H. Wehman, president and chief engineer of Spectro Oils of America and Intercontinental Lubricants Corp.

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TORTURE TOUR:

The Cannonball Sea-to-Shining-Sea Memorial Trophy . . . Rally?

The infamous Dash has been slowed down, and stretched out a bit, too.

BY JOE KRESS

Remember the Cannonball Run, that balls-out, coast-to-coast dash that has been the subject of some five movies? Well, its originator, Brock Yates, is at it again, but this time the event is a rally, not a race. It's a rally of epic proportions, though. Yates' One Lap Of America, run this past April, was an 8704-mile, seven-day-long jaunt around the nation. And the idea behind this Big Lap was to design an event that more accurately reflected the motoring habits of most Americans: long-haul freeway trips at speeds a little closer to the everyday norm, instead of the all-out, gas-it-and-go approach needed for the old Cannonballs. Kind of a nonstop vacation-on-the-go, touring at 60-plus mph.

So the guantlet was thrown down, the challenge made. Rules were simple: Complete the route, which connected Boston, Seattle, San Diego and Miami, and then arrive back at the start/finish line exactly 168 hours later, plus or minus two minutes. And to keep a check on unauthorized shortcuts to make up for lost time, finishers had to have a final odometer reading within 2 percent of the official route mileage, which would be revealed only after the rally ended.

And the entry requirements for this event's inaugural running were just as simple. One Lap Of America was open to any vehicle, regardless of age, displacement or modification. Cars, trucks, buses, limos and even motorhomes were eligible. So were motorcycles, and that's where we come in.

Seventy-six teams were flagged off from the start at the Lock, Stock and Barrel restaurant in Darien, Connecticut. They were driving everything from a '57 Rolls Royce to a Dodge van to a Chevrolet taxicab (Transcontinental cab fare, incidentally, works out to $11,770.50, plus tip.). But the hands-down winner in

the hardcore numbbutt category was the lone motorcycle entry: Team Cycle Madness, the official/unofficial Harley-Davidson factory effort. The Boys From Milwaukee figured that the best way to do a lap of America was aboard an American motorcycle. So, with the blessings of H-D's chairman Vaughn Beals ("Are you guys crazy? Hell, that sounds like fun. Need another rider?") the Harley-Davidson Motor Company officially became rally entry Number 74.

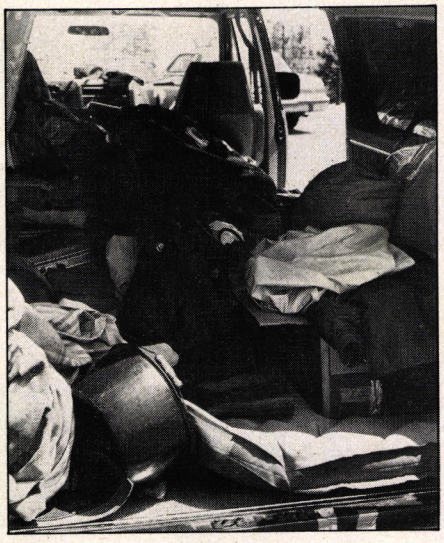
But don't get the idea that Harley-Davidson's participation was the result of a carefully plotted ad campaign, hashed out months ahead in the board room. The actual decision wasn't made until Monday morning, April 9th. And with the official start scheduled for 9 p.m. on Friday, April 13, you begin to realize just what an eleventh-hour thrash this little project was. Riders had to be chosen, a bike prepped, and some sort of support system worked out, all in less than a week.

Picking riders was the easy part. When word got out inside the company that Harley was looking for volunteers, the lines formed. Hal Gottsacker, a district sales manager, Rick Jones, a Talledega test-facility mechanic, Jerry Knackert, president of the H-D worker's Local 209, and Ed Michel, a Milwaukee-based test engineer, were the lucky four. When these guys met at the York, Pennsylvania factory on Thursday morning it was for the first time. And it was at York where they got a first look at the bike they'd ride around the country, too: a brand-new FXRT. And in this case, brand-new means just that; the bike was red, shiny and right off the assembly line.

That took care of the riders and their mount. But to finish this rally on time meant riding 24 hours a day all week long. And that would require a support van for the riders to rest in. Harley offered the use of one of its factory race-team vans, but Gottsacker had the good sense to nix that idea. He saw no reason to rattle around inside an oil-soaked truck, using an XR750 head for a pillow when he owned a perfectly serviceable van already set up with captain's chairs, a refrigerator and a bed. So the deal was struck, and the foursome set off for Connecticut and the start of their continental challenge.

The northern leg, from Boston to Seattle, was hell. Not because of the bike; nothing went wrong there. Instead, it was the weather that wouldn't cooperate, with cold, steady rain almost all the way. The four riders automatically climbed into their snowmobile suits before doing their two-tankful tour of duty on the bike, no matter what the skies looked like at the start; they knew sooner or later they'd get wet. And it was on that same northern leg to Seattle and Turn Two where Jerry Knackert earned his Ironman award by volunteering to stay on the bike for eight-and-a-half continuous hours in the rain. That waterlogged part of the route also netted the team its only ticket, too, a sort of a "welcome home," from the Wisconsin State Police.

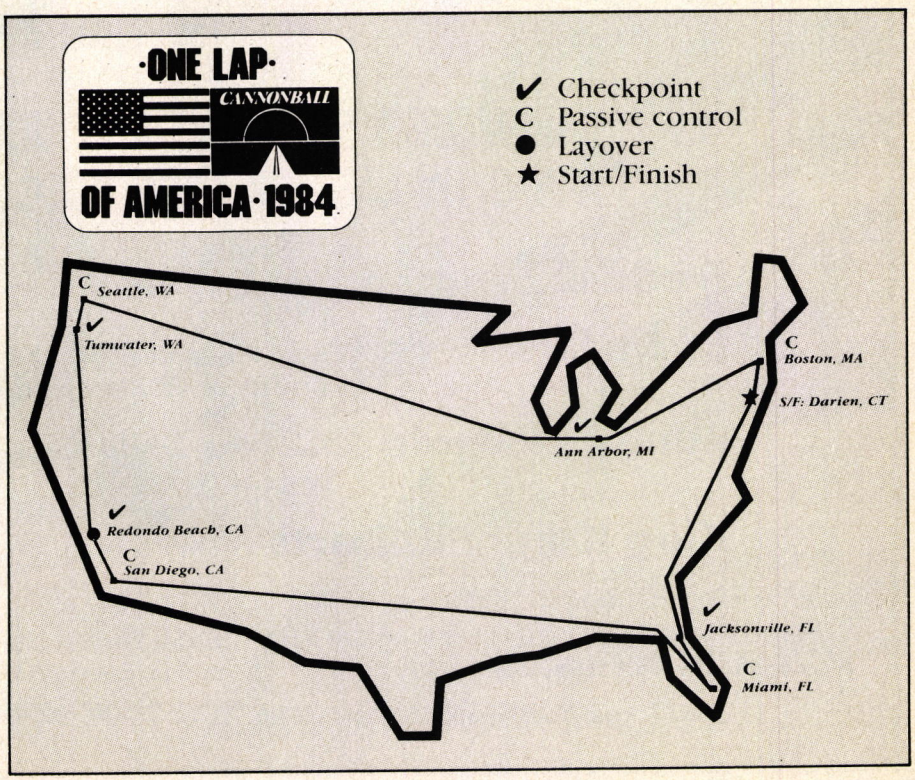
But after the left turn at Seattle the clouds lifted. There were no more flattrack slides across sanded mountain roads in the middle of the night. The raingear finally was stowed for good. And



the FXRT, with absolutely nothing done to it, other than an oil change before the start, was still chugging away. The bike didn't even require a chain adjustment during the entire trip.

Rider reliability, however, was another matter. A seven-day, non-stop trek can get to anyone, and these guys found themselves talking to the animals alongside the road. Gottsacker, in fact, swears he saw a UFO hovering over Montana. And the one modification made to the FXRT—a single spotlight mounted low on the right side—helped Ed Michel avoid a collision with a group of Mexicans sprinting across the highway for their illegal entry to the promised land.

If it hadn't been for those encounters with other worlds and near run-ins with the Border Patrol, the trip would have been a stone bore. There wasn't any mechanical excitement to keep the juices flowing, no second guessing about whether or not they'd even finish. And finish they did; the FXRT, more than a little bug-splattered and dusty, rolled back into the Lock, Stock and Barrel restaurant exactly 168 hours—to the minute—after having left. The final mileage didn't figure out quite as closely, though. Officially the run was pegged at 8704 miles, but the Harley team checked in with 8638 miles showing. They were the best-finishing motorcycle entry, though; of course, they were the *only* motorcycle entry. And now they're looking for some competition. ●



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SPORT LINES

Cycle Guide's True Tales of Racecourses, Dark Horses and Machines at Speed

BY DAIN GINGERELLI

PHOTOGRAPHY © 1984 RICH CHENET

250cc Grand Prix Roadracing

Taking class action against the world.

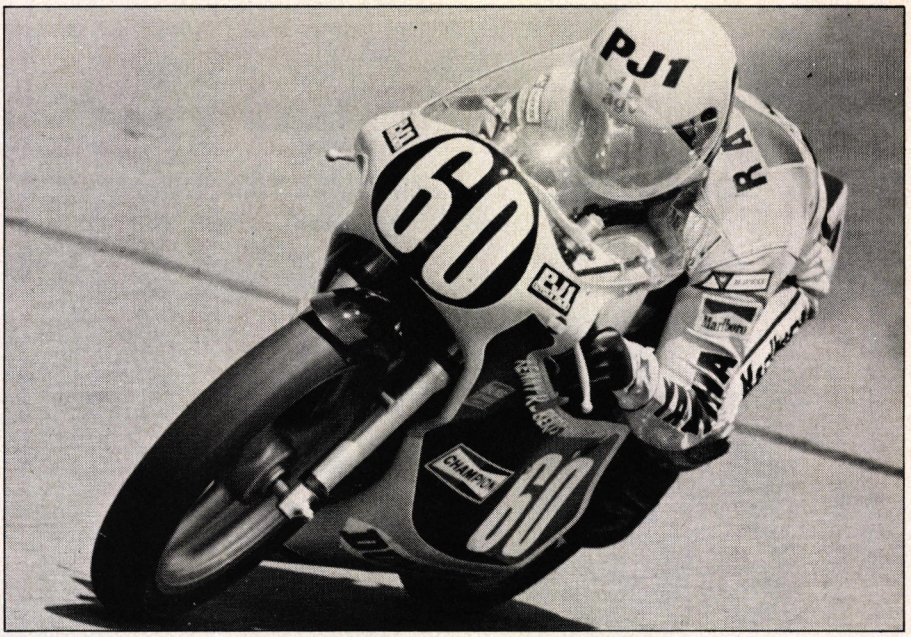
• While Kenny Roberts and Freddie Spencer were busy exchanging wins in the 500cc Grands Prix last year, another points battle practically went unnoticed by Americans. It was the 250cc World Championship, a contest that saw eight different riders win races during the 11-race season. Venezuela's Carlos Lavado, riding a Yamaha TZ250, finally won the championship.

The 250 class has been called a crapshoot by some, mainly because there are so many riders and brands of bikes capable of winning. Such names as Sarron, Guilleux, deRadigues, Cornu and Wimmer, and machines such as Kobas, Villa, Rotax, Armstrong and Garelli—along with Yamaha—comprise a typical 250 GP grid. Recently, Honda has gotten involved, by developing a 250-class production racer. But both the new Honda RS250R and the Yamaha TZ250 lack the sophisticated carbon-fiber

Continued

components and other lightweight materials used in their 500cc factory stablemates. And as long as Honda and Yamaha don't have factory teams in the class, their production 250s likely will remain comparatively unsophisticated. As three-time 500cc World Champion Kenny Roberts explained, "The factories (Yamaha, Honda, Suzuki and Kawasaki) won't get into the 250 racing, here (United States) or Europe. There's no reason to. The 500s put a drain in their budgets as it is."

For the most part, European 250 racing does very well without the factories. Most teams support their racing with money brought in from outside sources. For instance, Pernod, the French champagne company, underwrites its own 250 team, which uses Rotax-based engines in specially designed chassis. Many other teams have cigarette or helmet companies as major sponsors. Roberts, who manages Team Marlboro's 250 team (with Wayne Rainey and Englishman Alan Carter as riders) said, "Practically every European cigarette company has a 250 team." Consequently, the class has become a haven for first-rate, nonfactory riders eager to earn a living—and to win races.



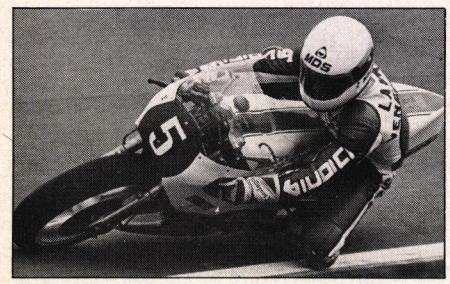
Wayne Rainey warmed up for this year's Grand Prix by winning the Daytona F2 race

The Superbike champ adjusted well to the little two-stroke Yamaha.

F2 riders talk before practice

A casual class for serious racers.

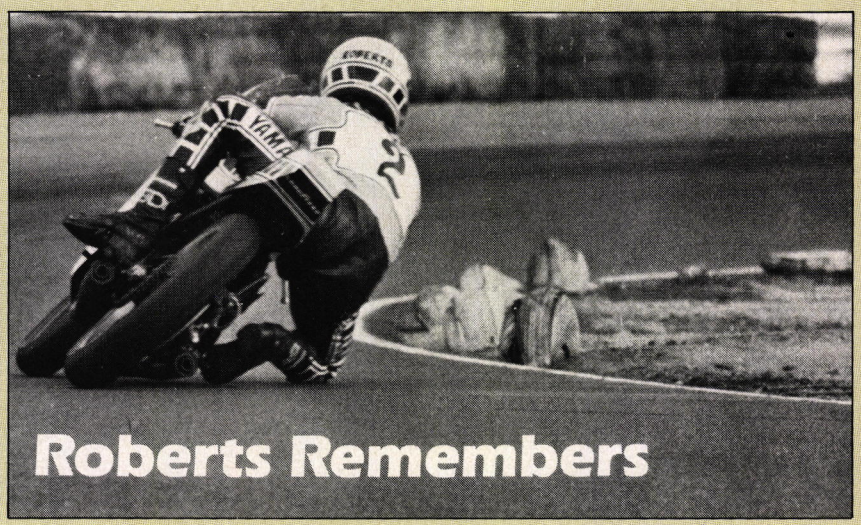
In contrast to the popularity of 250cc World Championship racing, the feeling in America is that the class, based on the AMA's Formula 2, might never be as popular with race fans here. Ken Clark, Yamaha's race director, pointed out that Formula 2 has received only a mediocre reception in the United States. "It's a shame," said Clark, "but the American race



250cc World Champion Carlos Lavado

And Yamaha wins again.

Roberts Remembers



• Kenny Roberts will probably always be remembered as the man who mastered the Yamaha TZ750, and who could ride a 500cc GP bike with the best of them. But as far as King Kenny is concerned, the most fun bike to ride on a roadrace track is a 250; in his case, the Yamaha TZ250.

Roberts actually began his roadracing career for Yamaha riding the quarter-liter bikes, and was successful in most AMA 250 Nationals where he competed. Even today, Roberts looks back on his 250 racing days as fun. "I like 250 racing," he said recently. "You can go anywhere on the track with one of those things. They're fun to ride."

And the week before Daytona this year, Roberts took a TZ250 that he helped prepare (Chuck Aksland's) around the Florida track during a private practice session Yamaha had reserved to test the 695cc factory bikes. "I rode ours last week," Roberts said shortly after his Daytona 200 win, "and I had a blast. I was high on the banking, and said to myself, 'I want to go over there, down low.' And I just pointed the bike down, and went there." That was at about 140 mph, which gives some idea of just how maneuverable these little roadracers can be.

And so, if one of the best roadracers known gives the little tiddlers (tiddlers by American standards, that is) his seal of approval, there is no reason why many other U.S. riders can't begin to enjoy the 250 class. Because as European riders have discovered, they're cheaper than F1 or Superbikes to race, and 250 racing is as close as any you'll ever find.

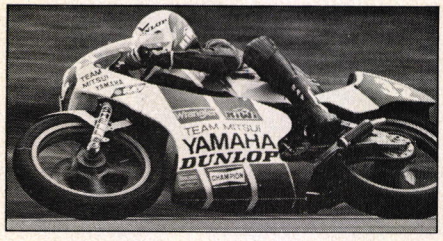
—Dain Gingerelli

community doesn't care for 250 racing. The engines, they feel, are too small. Americans like big engines that produce big horsepower. That's too bad, because some of the best racing at AMA National roadraces involve the small-bore bikes."

Clark very well could have been talking about the past two AMA Riverside Pro-Am races. While the F2 race serves as a support feature to Superbike racing at all Pro-Ams, the Riverside F2 races at the Southern California track have been the best races of the program for the past two years. This year, not only did the Honda RS250R vee-twin make its debut at the Riverside race, its rider, Sam McDonald, and Yamaha-mounted David Busby put on a wheel-to-wheel dice the entire 18 laps around the 2.67-mile course. And still, the Formula 2 race had been relegated by the promoters to the final event of the day. While many of the 6500 spectators were concerned about getting an early start home after the Superbike main that afternoon, McDonald and Busby bumped fairings, drafted each other through the high-speed esses, and, in Busby's case, almost broadslided into the boilerplate wall on the outside of the Turn Nine righthand sweeper.

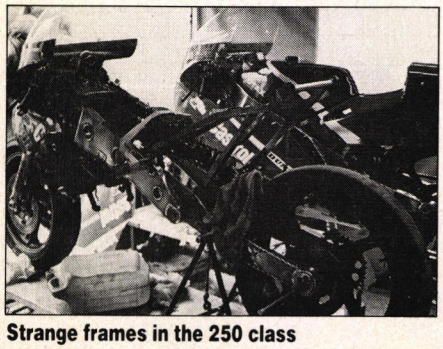
The same kind of tight racing is expected in 1984 250cc World Championship. Railbirds have predicted the '84 series will be even tighter than last year's shootout. But for the most part, they think that a Yamaha-powered bike will win again. And considering that the TZ's piston-port engine is produced in large quantities (Yamaha reportedly built about 300 TZ250Ls this year), and is available for sale to any qualified racer with about $10,000, the 250 class will continue, for at least another year, to be one in which privateers can compete with a good chance of winning.

—Dain Gingerelli



Alan Carter now rides for Kenny Roberts

Trying to spread championship fever.



Strange frames in the 250 class

Monocoque chassis for Rotax engines.

Continued

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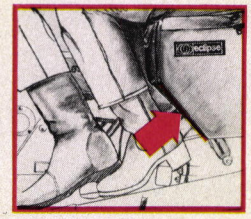

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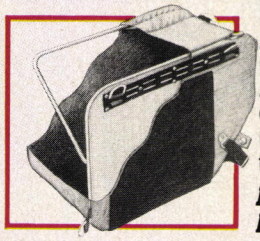

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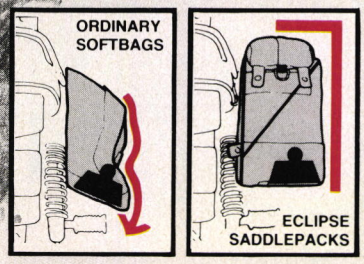

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A public safety message from the Safety Helmet Council of America

SAFETY HELMET COUNCIL OF AMERICA
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ROADRACING:

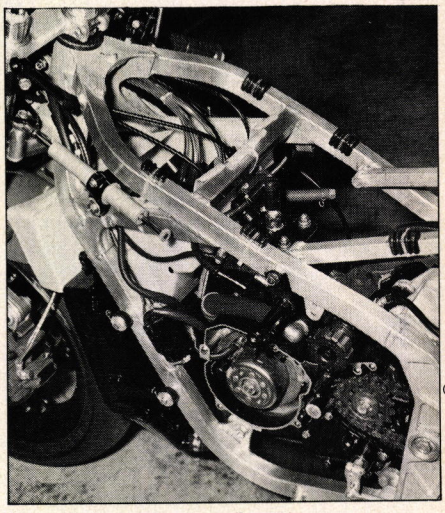
Honda RS250R

A racer for the masses.

• Two years ago, the Honda RS250R roadracer was just a twinkle in some engineer's eye. Today it's a reality, almost ready for sale to a select number of racers in America and Europe. The price: About $7000 to U.S. riders, according to Honda roadrace team manager Udo Geitl.

The new Honda's design is based on a recently introduced vee-twin streetbike available in Japan. The 250R frame uses aluminum square tubing, with a cast-aluminum steering head and swingarm-pivot junction. The bike has a wheelbase of 53 inches, with a steering head angle of 25.5 degrees and 3.5 inches of trail. According to Sam McDonald, who first rode the 250R at the AMA Pro-Am race at Riverside International Raceway, April 15, the Honda steers slightly quicker than the Yamaha TZ250 that he raced to the Formula 2 championship two years ago.

The 250R's engine is a 90-degree vee-twin. Like the NS500 vee-three, the 250 is equipped with reed-valve induction that feeds directly into the crankcase. The two 34mm oval-venturi Keihin carburetors fit



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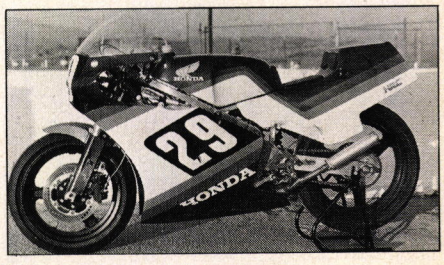
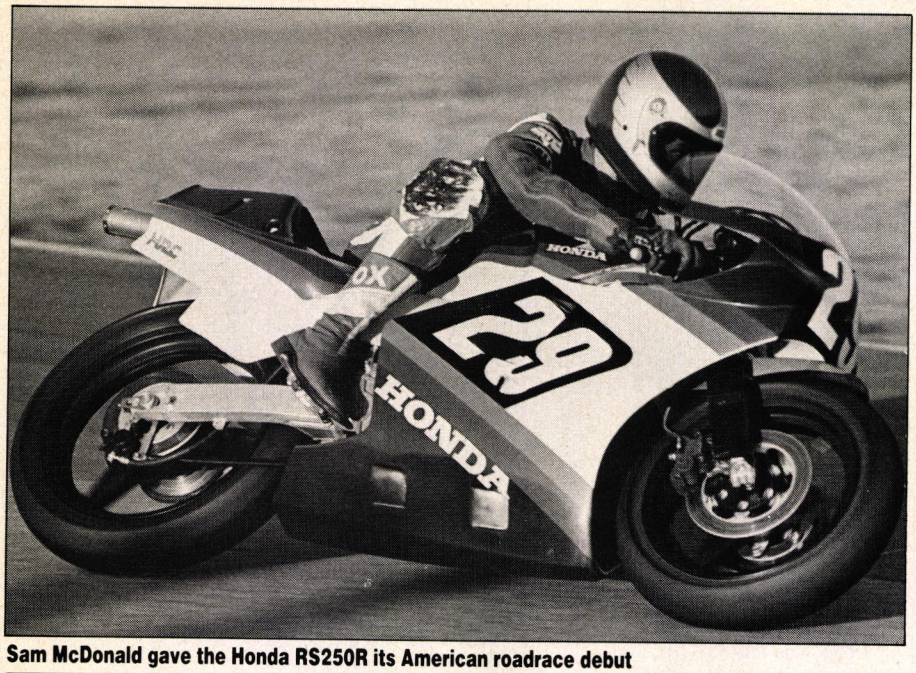
Vee-twin in an aluminum frame

Utilizing GP techno-tricks.



McDonald's Honda in battle trim

One of only two 250Rs in America.



Sam McDonald gave the Honda RS250R its American roadrace debut

The bike was impressive, in appearance and in performance.

in the valley between the cylinders. Bore and stroke dimensions of 56mm x 50.6mm give a displacement of 249cc, with a claimed power output of 66 horsepower.

Honda put some of its Grand Prix experience to use in developing the chassis for the new racer, too, and the RS250R is the first over-the-counter roadracer to utilize a 16-inch front wheel. The Honda comes with three-spoke cast-magnesium wheels, dual 10-inch front disc brakes, and a single 8.7-inch rear. Claimed dry weight, with fairing, is 228 pounds. On paper at least, the bike looks competitive.

And the bike's debut at Riverside bears out that impression. McDonald finished second, less than a bike-length behind Yamaha TZ250L-mounted Dave Busby at the Riverside race. McDonald actually led a majority of the 18 laps, but when the Honda's front tire broke loose in the fast Turn Two on the final lap, Busby opened up a substantial lead to take the win for Yamaha.

So the future appears favorable for the new Honda, which will battle Yamaha and Can-Am/Rotax in America for top honors in a class that is a privateer's paradise. Honda's only problem now is availability of the new vee-twin: According to Honda roadrace team manager Udo Gietl, there are only two RS250Rs in the country, with additional numbers due later this year. Then, and only then, will the bikes be offered for sale.

Until that time, McDonald will more than likely be the only rider in the AMA F2 class riding a Honda. The remainder of the field will consist of Yamaha- and Rotax-powered racers. But just because McDonald will be outnumbered, don't think for a minute that he'll be outgunned. Because as the race at Riverside showed, the bike has the horsepower to win, and McDonald knows how to use it. —*Dain Gingerelli*

Continued

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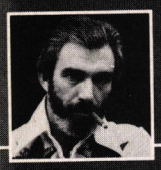

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The French Connection

The Paris Supercross makes indoor racing fashionable in Europe.

• There was a time when it was considered unfashionable for European motocross racers to be seen on a Supercross track. After all, motocross was born on The Continent, and to change the sport was considered nearly sacreligious. Motocross bikes were made to race on natural terrain. The attitude seemed to be that man-made courses favored showmanship over sportsmanship.

Times have changed, and now there are several major indoor motocross events held in Europe each year. The Genoa and Amsterdam races are the two best known. And as of March 14, Paris was added to the list. Considering that France's fashion capital has given Supercross it's seal of approval, the indoor sport seems on its way to a new level of acceptance in Europe. The Paris Supercross was held at the city's new indoor sports arena, the Paris Bercy Stadium. And to assure that the 12,000-plus seats were filled with paying spectators, the race promoters managed to lure several top American motocross racers for the two-day event. American Honda sent Wrangler Super Series Champion David Bailey to ride a stock CR250R, while Yamaha riders Ricky Johnson and Broc Glover rode Euro-model YZ250Ls supplied by Yamaha's French importer,

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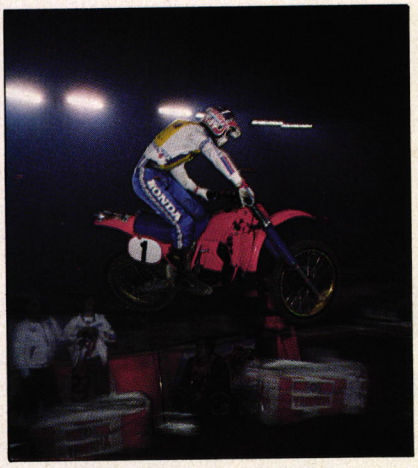
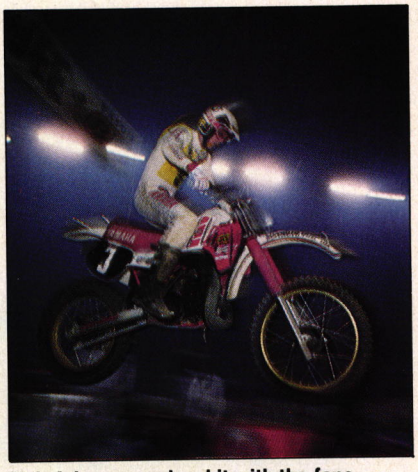


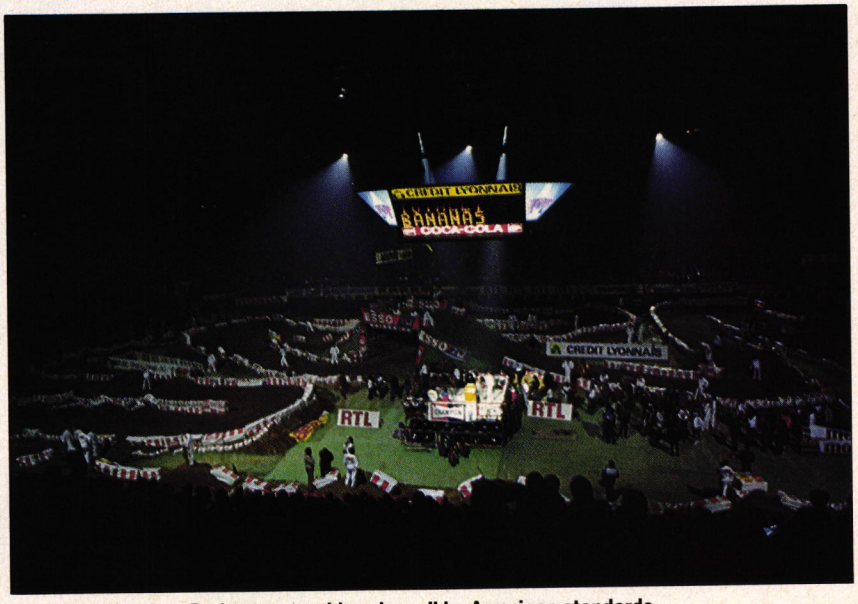
David Bailey, AMA's No. 1, flies

And landed a win.



Rick Johnson made a hit with the fans

But he didn't win a race.



The indoor track at Paris was considered small by American standards

But like any Supercross, the racing there was close.

Sonauto. Former 250cc World Champion Danny LaPorte made the program as well.

The U.S. contingent faced several top European riders, including 500cc World Champion Hakan Carlqvist, and 250cc kingpin Georges Jobe. Despite the presence of the two world champions, O'Mara and Bailey swapped wins, Johnny O winning on Wednesday night, while Bailey took Thursday's race.

Although the Americans dominated the racing (Johnson was third and second for the two evenings, and Glover had a pair of fourths), the indoor arena presented a problem that was new to the U.S. riders: The track was small—much smaller than most U.S. tracks. The track size had little effect on the reception by the crowd, however, as Bailey noted, "It (the stadium) is way too small for us back home, but I think we put on a good show and that the public liked it."

Johnny O'Mara signals to Bailey

Each won a moto in Paris.

Bailey gets a taste of Europe

After sampling victory.

And selling the Europeans on Supercross racing was of major concern to the American riders, because they would like to see indoor motocross become as popular in Europe as it is in America. As Johnson said after the final race in Paris, "We came here to race and win, but if the crowd remembers us, that's even better." —*Dain Gingerelli*

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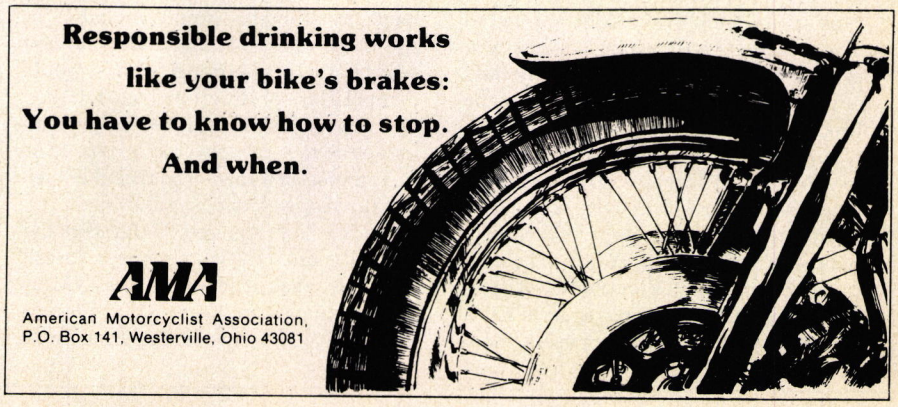
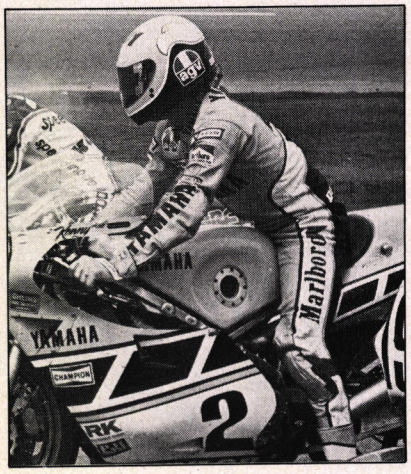


Pit Bits



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Roberts and Yamaha enjoy a Marlboro

Now, will anyone give them a beer?

• Beer break: It seems that Yamaha's successful involvement with Marlboro cigarettes in the 500cc Grand Prix might lead the motorcycle company to knocking on other sponsor's doors for its roadrace programs in America. With the Laguna Seca National cutting into the middle of the GP season, Yamaha is finding it costly to ship its 500cc racebikes halfway around the world for this one event. So, to help cut its costs, Yamaha Motor Corporation, U.S.A. has been talking with at least one large beer brewer: "If we sign the deal," said a Yamaha spokesman, "We should have the 500 vee-four bikes for (Kenny) Roberts and (Eddie) Lawson at Laguna Seca. And (team manager Giacomo) Agostini will surely come over with them." Furthermore, if enough sponsorship money is available, Daytona lightweight-winner Wayne Rainey will be entered in the Laguna Seca Formula 2 event, riding his Daytona TZ250L.

• Daytona or bust: While Yamaha's Daytona 1985 plans are not final, the company that has won the 200 every year since 1972 (with a little help from several privateer teams) may not enter the 200 unless a similar Laguna Seca-type sponsorship deal can be applied to The Beach. The rumor at Yamaha now is that there will be no factory-backed entry for the 200 unless money can be brought in from outside sources.

• Superbike scuttlebutt: But Yamaha may bypass the Daytona 200 for another reason—the Superbike race. The latest word is that there is a Superbike project planned for 1985. The obvious choice is to put number plates on the RD500 vee-four, which Yamaha hopes to have EPA-certified by next year. There is one roadblock that racewatchers have overlooked: The two-stroke Yamaha weighs less in street trim than the AMA Superbike minimum of 390 pounds. But as one Yamaha administrator put it, "We've already talked with the AMA about changing that."

• Red Sunday: Tax day, April 15, was a day in which the motorcycle race community went in the red—Honda red. While taxpayers received a one-day reprieve from the IRS, Honda gave no such breaks to its competition. The company won just about every professional race it had entered that weekend; 500cc Grand Prix World Champion Freddie Spencer won the Italian GP, finishing 20 seconds ahead of Yamaha-mounted Eddie Lawson, while in California, Honda's only factory-backed Superbike rider, Fred Merkel, won the AMA Riverside Pro-Am, beating Wes Cooley, who rode a Suzuki GS750ES. And the night before, American Honda's Ricky Graham won the Sacramento Mile on his NS750, while motocrosser Johnny O'Mara won the Dallas Supercross at the Cottonbowl. It was a weekend that should keep several IRS agents busy—and happy with Honda riders.

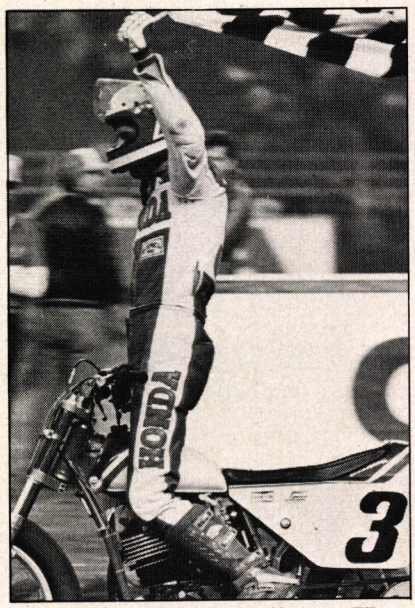
• Friduss first in Florida: Sherry Friduss became the first woman to appear in Daytona International Speedway's victory circle for a reason other than to pass out kisses and trophies: Friduss won the modified-production class in the Battle of the Twins race. She put her Moto Guzzi Le Mans ahead of the 44 other riders. Unfortunately, there was no trophy king to congratulate her after the 50-mile race.

• Two will get you three: ATV sales in America this year are projected to be in excess of 500,000 units. But so far, the only manufacturers who have recognized the marketing advantage to racing ATVs are Honda and Kawasaki. That could change, however, as Yamaha might throw its hat into the three-wheeler's ring soon. Yamaha race director, Ken Clark, said that any involvement by Yamaha would probably be similar to what the motocross team now enjoys; factory-support riders would compete on production-based trikes, and any technical information pertaining to the race trikes would be passed on to Yamaha customers who race their yellow three-wheelers.

• Quicker than the eye: Dragracers live by the code, "He who snoozes, loses." And that was evident at the NMRA Gatornationals in Gainesville, Florida, last March. In one of the first-round eliminations for the Pro Stock class, Charles Gressman (Suzuki) was paired against Randy Mason (Kawasaki). In the showdown, Gressman posted a reaction time—the time it takes a rider to react to the greenlight—of 0.400 seconds (anything under that causes a foul, or redlight). And it was Gressman's reaction time that saved him from losing his race with Mason, since he had a slower elapsed time (E.T.) of 8.725 seconds, versus Mason's 8.719. In the next round, Gressman posted a 0.401-second reaction time, and he beat Dave Schultz (Kawasaki two-stroke). In the final round, Gressman's hand was quicker than opponent Terry Vance's, but his bike wasn't. Gressman lost, 8.820 to Vance's 8.631. But as a consolation, Gressman again posted the quicker reaction time, hitting the buzzer 0.459 second after the green, while Vance had a 0.481.

• Back to school: Tony DiStefano's hands are still pretty quick, but an eye injury forced his retirement from racing a few years ago. Now DiStefano is putting his racing experience to use by instructing a motocross school sponsored by Esprit and Husqvarna. The Tony D Motocross Seminars are open to all riders, and now Husqvarna is sending buyers of 1984 CR MXers to the school as a ploy to get riders on Huskys, and Huskys in the winner's circle.

• Four play: Roadrace aficionados will remember 1984 as the year in which four Americans—Freddie Spencer, Kenny



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Ricky Graham after winning Houston TT

On Red Sunday, he won Sacramento.

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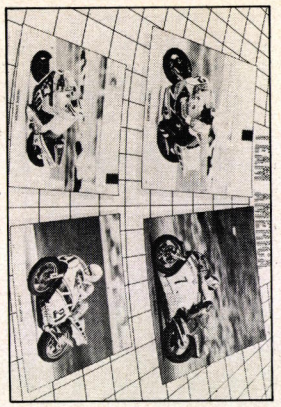
Roberts, Randy Mamola and Eddie Lawson—swept the top four positions in the final Grand Prix standings. And for your wall-viewing pleasure, G.P. Products has a 20 x 29-inch poster showing each of the four riders on his factory racer. The black-and-white posters are available for $5.50 from G.P. Products, 3857 Birch St., Suite 111, Newport Beach, California 92660.

• Quote Department: During the first of two 18-lap heats for the Budweiser/Bell Helmet Superbike 100 at Riverside Raceway last April, eight riders crashed in Turn Seven when oil was spilled by a fallen rider in the low-speed corner. In calling the chain of events, race announcer Larry Huffman described the scene: "All of the riders appear to be okay, but it looks like a motorcycle swap meet down there." —*Dain Gingerelli*

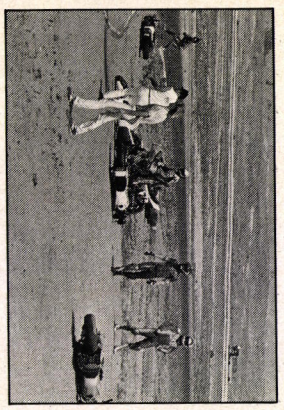
Sherry Friduss riding her Moto Guzzi

Delivering a Battle of the Twins win.



A sneak preview of Team America poster

Four for the wall.



Superbike carnage at Riverside Raceway

A motorcycle swap meet.

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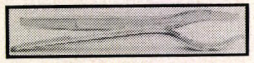

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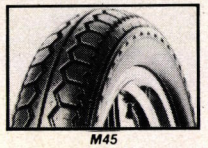

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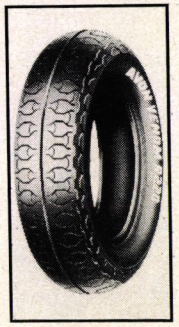

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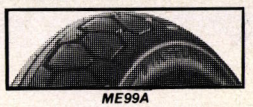

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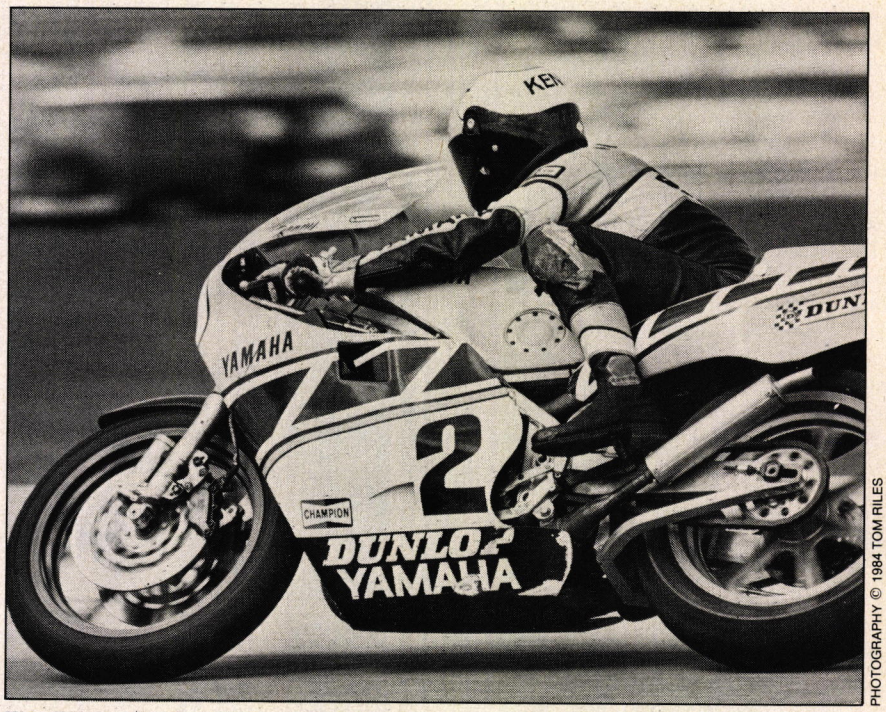
OW69 Revealed

Yamaha's Daytona Special is no longer special.

• It was one of the best-kept secrets in race history. For more than a year, most people in the race community thought that Kenny Roberts' Daytona-winning Yamaha OW69 engine displaced about 680cc. And for about a year and a half, nobody disputed that figure; but then, nobody really knew the actual displacement of the bored-out two-stroke engine. All anybody outside the Yamaha tent knew for certain was that the square-four had larger cylinder jugs than it had when it was Roberts' front-line Grand Prix racer the previous year.

And so, all during 1983 Cycle Week the OW69 was a favorite topic of discussion, but one question could not be answered: How much more than 500cc was



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King Kenny riding the infamous OW69 for the final time at Daytona, 1984

And all this time, we thought that it was just a 680.

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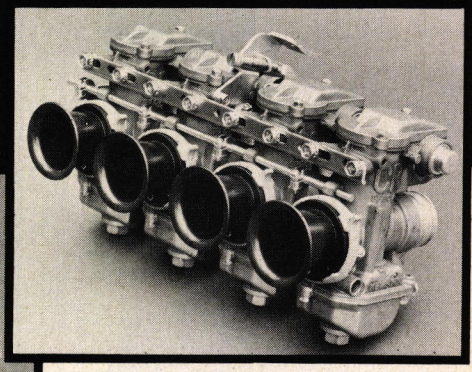

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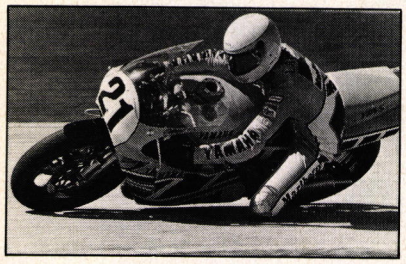
the OW69 engine? Most of the self-proclaimed experts figured 650cc. Even Nobby Clark, Roberts' tuner last year, publicly stated that any two-stroke race engine displacing more than 650cc "was a waste." As for Roberts, he was silent; Ken Clark, Yamaha's race director, said only that the engine was "larger than 500cc, but smaller than 750cc," the class limit for two-strokes.

That didn't stop people from speculating, though, and somewhere, somehow, someone at Daytona said it was a 680. It was a believable figure, one the moto-press clung to. And so with no confirmation by Yamaha, the OW69 was proclaimed to be a 680.

Well, the truth is now out, the secret over. The OW69, a bike that even Rob-



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Lawson's luck wasn't as good on OW69

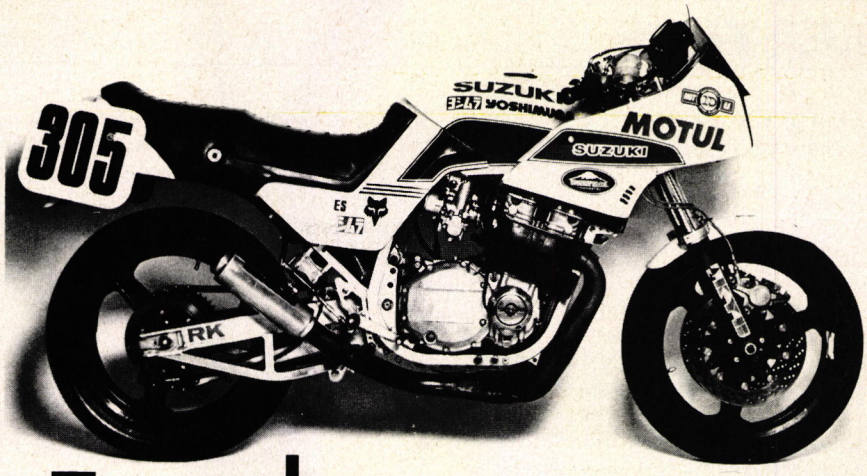
He never won a race with it.

erts considered too fast to be raced, displaces 695cc. According to a Yamaha in-house memo, the Americanized GP roadracer has a bore and stroke of 64mm x 54mm.

But the funny thing about this revelation is that it was public knowledge from the beginning. As Ken Clark said, "Anybody could have found out the displacement if they really wanted to. We have to notify the AMA of the bore and stroke for each engine raced at Daytona. All anybody had to do was ask the AMA. But nobody bothered." Clark confessed that even he never calculated the engine's exact displacement; the bike was fast, the engine was legal, and that was all that mattered.

The memo contains some other interesting figures about the OW69: Yamaha claims a dry weight—no oil, gas or water—of 297 pounds (Roberts' bike weighed in at 302 for this year's race.) The steering head angle is 26 degrees, and trail is 105mm. As for horsepower, the memo states, "150-plus."

Which gives us another mystery, one that will probably never be solved: How much horsepower does the 695cc engine really produce? Enough to win two Daytona 200s, that's for sure. But it really doesn't matter, because as in any form of racing, it's not the size of the engine that matters, but where the bike finishes. In that respect, at least, there's no doubt about the OW69; it finished first at The Beach both tries. —*Dain Gingerelli*



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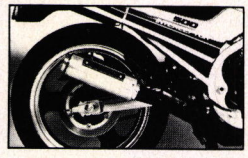

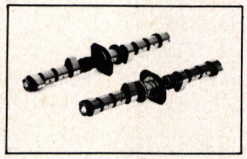

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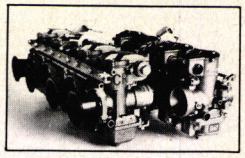

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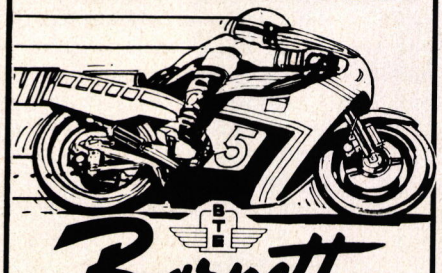

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LETTERS *Setright set right, feud feedback, and shattered dreams.*

KING'S ENGLISH

I have been an occasional reader of CYCLE GUIDE for many years, but after reading L.J.K. Setright's column in your April issue, I may turn into a subscriber. In "Ecclesiastes VII:29" Setright not only expressed an opinion with which I agree wholeheartedly (always an admirable trait in a columnist), but he couched it in genuine grammatical English. I am astounded and delighted.

In recent years I have grown, if not accustomed, at least resigned, to the work of modern journalists being rife with all that is bad in modern English usage. I have stopped grinding my teeth every time someone said they'd been "orientated," when they had no thought of aligning themselves toward the east. I have stopped shrieking every time I came across a sentence beginning with a coordinating conjunction (my larynx would be but a memory). It is difficult to express my sheer joy at reading the work of someone for whom no such allowances need be made. Thank you very much. May Edwin Newman bless you abundantly.

Peter W. Swanson
Ramona, California

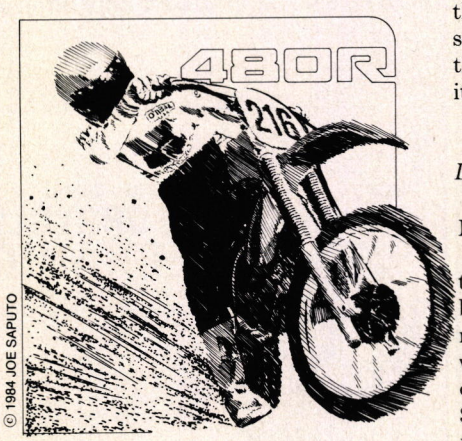
But we won't stop grinding our teeth when someone says, "...someone said they'd..."—ed.

COME AGAIN?

In regard to L.J.K. Setright's column, "Ecclesiastes VII:29" in the April 1984 issue: "Huh?"

Dr. David Hester
Dayton, Tennessee

Ask Edwin Newman—ed.



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MINUS ONE

You really should have named your magazine Honda Guide. You constantly over-glorify Honda motorcycles. I reached the point where I gave away one issue, due to your over-biased journalism toward Honda. Needless to say, I won't be renewing my subscription. I'm sick of looking at and reading about Hondas; you couldn't run fast enough to give me one of them. Hondas have been and always will be tiny specks on the horizon, in my rearview mirror.

Karl Tolley
Luke AFB, Arizona

PLUS ONE

I just recently purchased a subscription to your magazine, and have noticed in the letters section that a number of your readers think that your show a great deal of favoritism toward Honda. I read your comparison test, "Battle of the Big Rigs," in the March 1984 issue, and thought the article was very informative and well written. In my opinion it was the most unbiased comparison I've ever read. I have just gotten into motorcycling, and you can bet your articles will help me with any decisions I have to make.

Kent E. Latiner
Fritch, Texas

If you had held out on the subscription, Tolley might have given you his—ed.

THE FEUD HEATS UP

Regarding the "Family Feud" in the May 1984 issue of CYCLE GUIDE: I truly find the Honda lineup quite boring; especially when compared to such superlative machines as the GPzs. Although I don't ride the larger bikes, I do race a 1984 GPz550 in the AFM. As a result, I did fear the arrival of the VF500F; it sounded like a great bike. Now that the '84 racing season has started, my fears of this Honda have greatly diminished. It seems the VF500F will not be much of a threat. The little Interceptor may show its stuff yet, but I doubt it.

Keith Erickson
Lafayette, California

Don't—ed.

MISSED MATCH

I enjoyed the various shootouts between the Interceptors and Kawasakis, but there was one match-up you missed—one the Kawasaki would have won. Here's what you get when, instead of a VF750F, you throw down an extra $100 and buy a Ninja: Two extra pounds, the same gas mileage, a six-mph-higher top speed, ¾-second quicker quarter-mile, and the bulletproof Z-1 inline-four heritage to boot.

Richard Brewer
Yosemite National Park, California

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SHORT SHRIFT

In your road test of the Honda VF500F (April 1984 issue), Charles Everitt states that "a cramped seating position undercuts the 500's versatility somewhat." This sounds more like a shortcoming of the bike's dimensions, rather than rider's, which is not necessarily the case. In the same paragraph, the article states that the bike "doesn't provide much leg room, especially for tall riders," which is both discriminatory and redundant. Not every macho body sits Tom Selleck-tall, and there are women motorcyclists whose legs are shorter than Brooke Shields'. I'm sure a prospective buyer would try a bike out for size and be the judge of the ergonomics. Your tests should objectively cover a bike's pluses and minuses, and cover any techno stuff that your readers can't find out in the showroom or on a test ride. Please keep the subjective comments for the Ride Reviews, or at least qualify them by saying, "speaking for myself...."

Edmund C. M. Cheung
Calgary, Alberta
Canada

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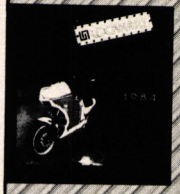

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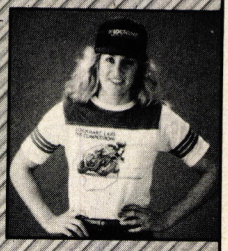

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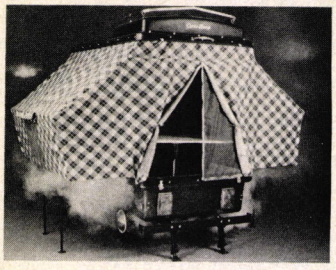

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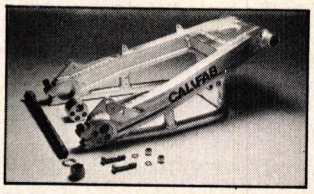

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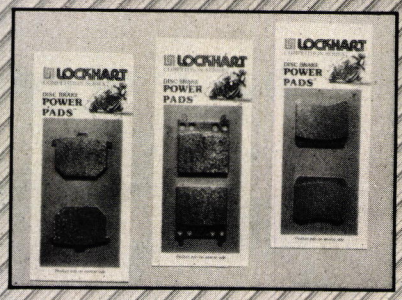

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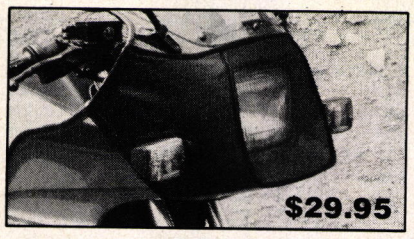

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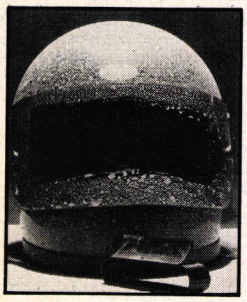

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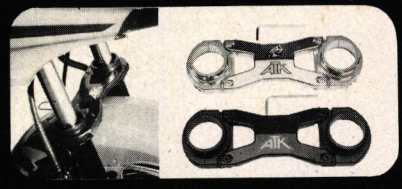

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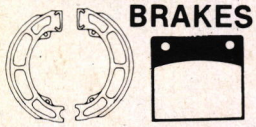

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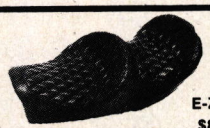

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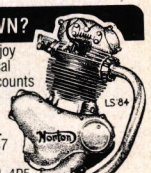

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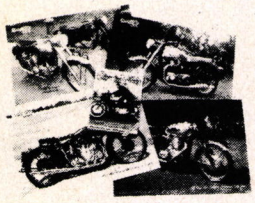

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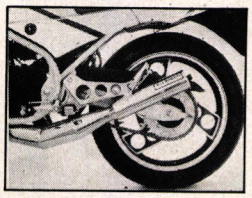

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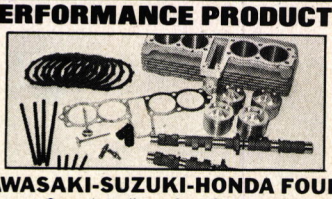

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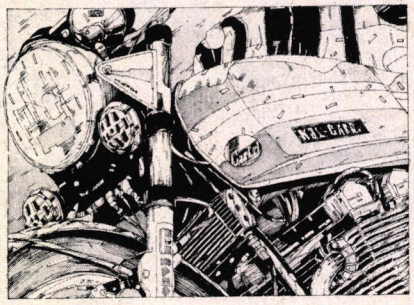

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traffic—and the roads. The transportation department has been trying to update the roads here to handle the increasing traffic for the past few years, but it just makes things worse. There isn't a single stretch of road here that isn't barricaded, detoured, potholed or grease-covered as a result. And the insurance rates are outrageous, due to Hawaii's no-fault insurance. Hawaii is beautiful, but if you ride you pay both in frustration and money. I envy CYCLE GUIDE's location in California, and hope to move there soon. I plan to bring my 1983 KZ1000R and find out just how good those canyon roads really are.

Stephen H. Shioi
Honolulu,
Hawaii

Nice going Shioi, you've just shattered some carefully tended illusions—ed.

RATIONAL REPLY

A comment on Mr. and Mrs. Stickley's letter in the April 1984 issue, wherein he castigates your magazine and, apparently, the rest of us for being "wimpy." I seriously doubt we would conquer any new frontiers by leaving helmets home (except the one from which no one can return).

It seems that the Stickleys are lamenting the public's (and the media's) willingness to let government take those rather dubious and dangerous choices out of our hands and impose its own politically motivated and sometimes arbitrary rules. Why are there no EPA pollution regulations on heavy-duty trucks? The government says that the trucking industry represents less than 15 percent of the traffic on our highways, and this small percentage can be ignored. But then why can't motorcycles' contribution to smog be ignored? Because the trucking lobby is far stronger in our state and federal capitals than the AMA. And despite the public's general cognizance of governmental arbitrariness, people in general seem to accept new regulations and restrictions docilely, with no more resistance than the occasional grumbling and gnashing of teeth. In France, farmers will riot to protest perceived governmental unfairness, but in this country this kind of strong protest is labeled "socialism." Our leaders are inclined to shout about "unpatriotic attitudes" when citizens protest the laws.

This is why the outlaw still appeals to many of us, including Mr. Stickley, who has probably owned a Harley or two in his younger days. For myself, I prefer a Honda VF750F Interceptor, and the occasional upraised digit as protest.

T.L. Hawkins
Arlington, Virginia

MANY WERE CULLED . . .

I read your "Big-Rig Shootout" with interest, and while I agree that considerable electronic gadgetry has been added to the Aspencade, Venture and Voyager, I fail to understand why Suzuki's GS1100GK was not included in the test. The Suzuki would not have rated the overall raves of Honda's Aspencade, but my bet is that it would have left the others behind in two categories: quarter-mile acceleration and roll-on capability.

Pat Peterson
New Brunswick
Canada

BUT FEW WERE CHOSEN

I enjoyed reading your touring bike comparison, but I feel something was missing. The article was well-written, but I think the comparison left out one of the best touring motorcycles from Europe—the Moto Guzzi California II.

Thomas J. Pronesti
Koppel, Pennsylvania

HARLEY WHAT?

In 1983, I thought that Honda's Shadow was (and always would be) the geekmobile to end them all. Obviously, I was wrong, and the new Viragos point this out quite clearly. This styling trend has prompted the development of a new adjective in conversations with my riding friends—"Harlier." The Viragos succeed in being Harlier than the Shadows. Honda's next move will obviously be to buy out H-D and bring the Harley's prices down.

Chris Woody
Albuquerque, New Mexico

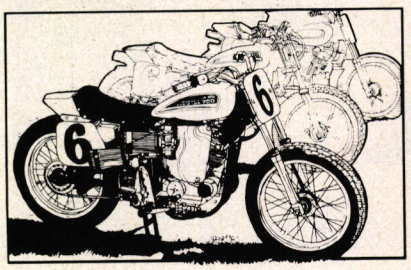
SECOND CHANCE

The popular sentiment in favor of freedom of choice with regard to helmet use is laudable in its apparent concern for individual rights of choice. I can even empathize, in an abstract sort of way. From a more practical viewpoint, however, one big concern keeps me from jumping on the bandwagon.

Here in Alberta, a driver's license is available at age 16. As is the most potent two-wheel weaponry ever seen, to those able to pony up a down payment. Jesus, the mind boggles. Also in Alberta, 18 years is the age at which one is deemed legally responsible and competent at this business of adultery (so to speak). Obviously similar age guidelines are in effect elsewhere.

My point is this: I can't speak for anyone else, but I was a certifiable lunatic until I tuned into my personal mortality at roughly age 22. I've been riding motorcycles for 14 years. Six of those years I spent riding the tiger without enough brains to keep the front of my helmet above eye level, let alone brains enough to voluntarily wear one of the things.

I'm not 16 anymore. These days I bleed. These days I cover my ass and thank my lucky inflatable doll that there



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was a law around that helped to give me a chance to stay alive until I gained the experience to take over the job for myself, full-time.

So I'll continue to keep my scarred old Arai around for sentimental reasons (not to mention its tall-tale value). And I'll keep my new Arai nice and shiny. And I'll consider the book I most likely will never write: "Dead Men Don't Ride." By the way, keep quiet about the doll; my wife doesn't understand.

Sam O'Donnell
Red Deer, Alberta
Canada

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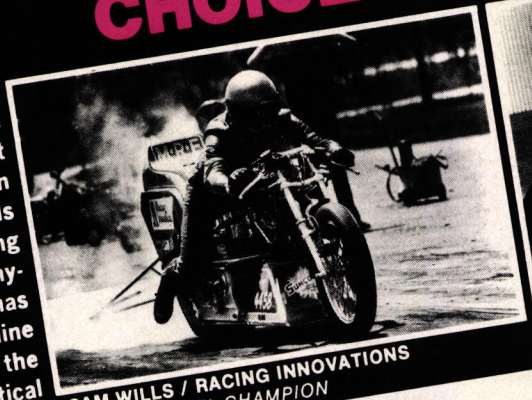

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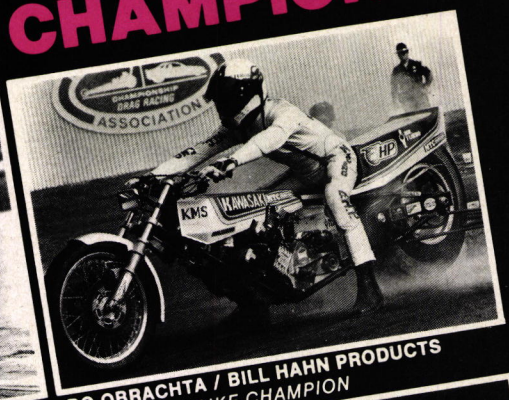

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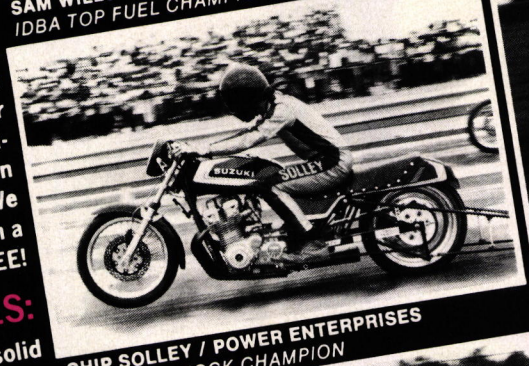

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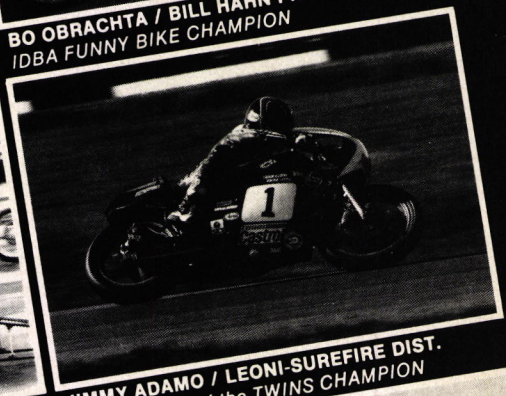

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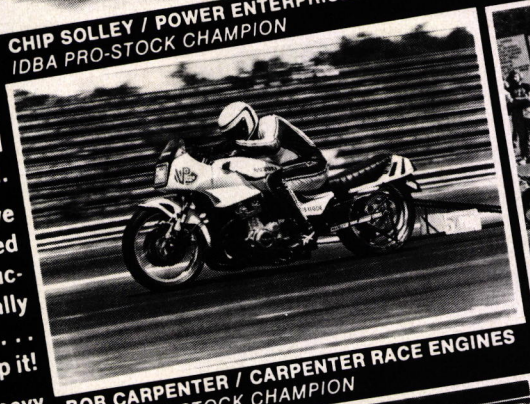

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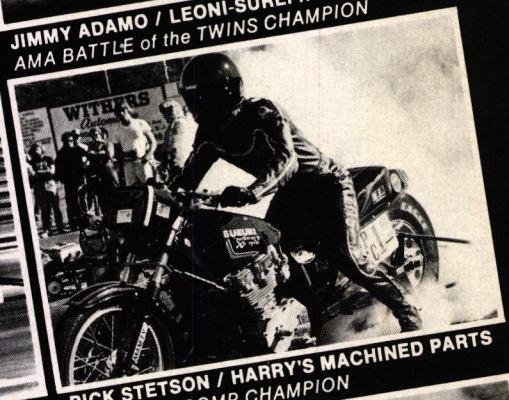

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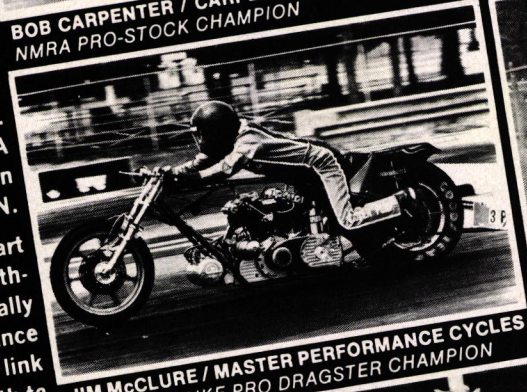

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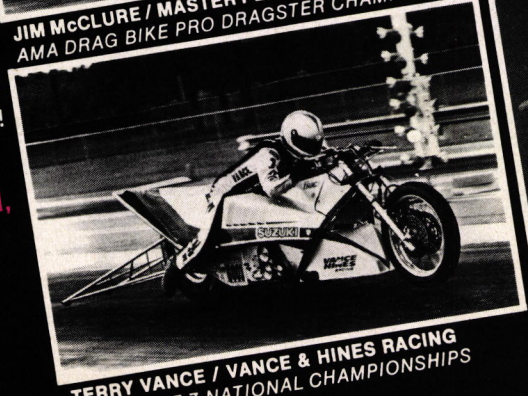

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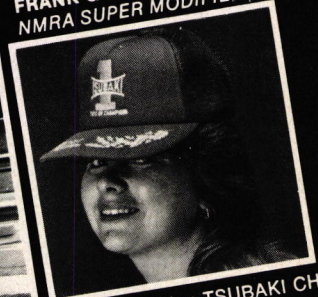

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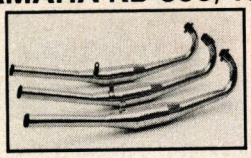

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